

UNHOLY RELICS
AND OTHER
UNCANNY TALES

To
MONTAGUE SUMMERS
for his
unrivalled knowledge
of
Medieval Sorcery

UNHOLY RELICS

and other

Uncanny Tales

by

M. P. DARE



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FOREWORD

These tales are fiction—and yet not fiction. They are all founded upon actual experiences of the author in the realms of the uncanny. The antiquary, perhaps because he is in close touch with the human thought of all time, that is not dead, but sometime sleepeth, comes more into contact with that dim borderline region than most people. This happens to a much greater extent than those whose lives are passed entirely in the turmoil of modern things sometimes realise ; they are apt, too, to think of the archæologist as a coldly scientific creature devoted only to hard facts, frowning on phantasy, and laughing at Egyptian curses.

I make little or no effort to explain the happenings on which the stories of this volume are based. The archæologist is not an occultist as such, nor has he any concern with spiritualism as a religion. The present state of our knowledge as to what actually lies beyond the veil, and what simply lives on in human memory timeless, always on earth and indestructible, is not such that we can afford to be dogmatic about it. We owe as much tolerance to the man who believes in ghosts because he is firmly convinced he has seen one, as to the chemist who refuses to believe in them because he cannot reduce them to his test-tube. We are only just beginning to realise how artificial are the conventional divisions we call Time and Space—and the East has forgotten more than the West has learnt on this subject. It

would seem that there must always remain some happenings that will defy explanation by man-made science, after we have found a natural reason for many others. At least, I hope so—for if not, of what avail are the strivings and speculations of the human spirit, born as they are of our ignorance as to what really lies beyond the last sleep? As the schoolmen of the middle ages were fond of quoting, from the Vulgate, *Quis nimis probat nihil probat*—he who proves too much proves nothing.

Long Vacation, 1946.

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UNHOLY RELICS

There is hardly a parallel in the British Isles, except possibly the instance of Wales, to the way in which the former old kingdoms and *comtes* of southern France have kept up their identity and their "nationalism." To this very day, for instance, the people of Provence, which was only annexed to France in 1480, do not regard themselves as Frenchmen.

The same is the case with that other ancient realm, Languedoc, lying on the west of the Great Plateau, in the valley of the stately Garonne, with the blue-grey Pyrenees ever in sight still further to the west. In this smiling country the tourist, if he has any taste for the mighty past at all, finds himself falling over the subject at every step. There is Narbonne, where yet lingers the shadow of imperial Rome ; there is Carcassonne, most perfect medieval city-fortress left in Europe ; and there is the kingdom's ancient capital, Toulouse, which, being generally eclipsed by the other two in tourist interest, has in consequence succeeded in remaining unspoilt.

As the reader may legitimately demand to know what I was doing in Toulouse, I must inflict upon him a little history (which is pardonable) and a little autobiography (which is an offence). It should be explained, then, that I, Gregory Wayne, and my lifelong friend Alan Granville, having grown up together from boyhood with a burning love for the past, going to the same school and university, both

sometime Fellows of our College, and both happily endowed with a modest competence that allows us to pursue our historical researches in comfort undisturbed by the worries of routine work, have for years been settled in a placid bachelor existence ensconced in a delightful old Leicestershire Wolds manor-house which we jointly purchased and restored.

Character-study being a boring obsession of modern writers to which we flatly refuse to pander, that is all the reader need bother to know about us. It only remains to mention that our monastic peace is undisturbed by the meddlesome hand of woman-kind, and that at the time of which I write, our domestic staff consisted of a couple of old ex-army batmen, excellent fellows and brothers, named James and John, wherefore we privately called them (when out of earshot) the Apostles.

A few years ago, then, we were engaged on a critical study of that tragic story of religious intolerance, the Albigensian War, which, early in the thirteenth century, fell with full force upon the city and district of Toulouse—by an irony of history, the very place that had been converted to the Christian faith as early as 250 A.D. by the saintly Sernin, or Satur-nin, who became its first bishop.

We came upon fresh material casting new light on the story of those unfortunate heretics the Albigenses ; so, as Granville's many accomplishments do not, unfortunately, include a good working knowledge of French (which, being my mother's tongue, is a second language to me), I left him behind at home working on the Norman and English side of the documents, and travelled to Toulouse to study

on the spot its rich archives of the period. My colleague had not by any means uninteresting work for his share, as the father of our own Earl Simon de Montfort looms large in the story, having led the crusade of orthodoxy against the city of Toulouse, which he besieged.

Before I set off, however, we had called for assistance upon a good and learned priest, Father Manson, who has helped us out of many difficulties, by reason of his unrivalled acquaintance with queer byways of church history and law ; and the friendship has so ripened with the passing of years that there is now rarely a week passes without his paying a visit (on a particularly loud-voiced and evil-smelling motor-cycle) to our quiet country home. I told him where I was going, in the hope that he might be able to put me into touch with some authorities on the spot to assist my researches—and I was not disappointed.

“It is still a somewhat obscure corner of Europe for the student,” he said, sacrilegiously tipping out a fresh tin of tobacco on to a fifteenth-century charter till Granville stopped him with a yell of anguish and proffered *The Times* instead, with a cynical remark as to the chief uses of newspapers. “Luckily, though, I do know one man down there who will be able and most willing to help. He is Father Saloux, *cure* of a little village whose name I can’t remember—it is years since I was down there—not far from Toulouse ; but he is well-known throughout southwest France as a scholar, and if you enquire at the Museum of Saint-Raymond you will easily get into touch with him. I will scribble a note to him to introduce you,” he added, seizing paper from among

the chaos on the huge study desk.

Father Manson thereupon proceeded to impart a piece of information which my *Baedeker* (as usual with anything really interesting) omits entirely.

"In the cathedral of St. Sernin," he said, "there is a most amazing collection of holy relics, and among them, I regret to say, those of two English saints. Both were removed from our soil by Louis the Eighth, who seems to have had a predilection for body-snatching in this direction.

"One is Saint Edmund the King, martyred in 870 A.D. by the Danes, who was at first laid to rest in the place consequently called Bury St. Edmunds, and the other is Saint Gilbert the Abbot, founder of the Gilbertine monastic order.

"As I say, it's so long since I was there that I have forgotten the details, but there are descriptive cards near the caskets containing the relics, if I remember rightly. It seems a great pity two of our star saints should be exiled from the scene of their labours, and, to tell you the truth, I've often wondered if a move could not be made to get their remains restored to England."

A couple of days later, fortified with the letter to Father Saloux, I set off. What with the difficulties of reaching London from our isolated home in the Wolds, the habitual unpleasantness of the Channel-crossing, and the equally habitual cheerlessness of Calais and its customs-house, I was fairly sick of things by the time I reached Paris. However, the journey down-country amply compensates for these troubles, and when we began to skirt the Central Plateau, a few miles from Limoges, I began to feel glad I had not taken the dull main route across

to Bordeaux.

Only one thing marred the pleasure of the journey: the presence in my compartment of one of those infernally sociable, chatty individuals who do their best to drag you into conversation, and whom it is really a kindness to snub. This particular specimen was a tourist, and his only redeeming feature was that he was not quite so blatant as the majority of his tribe. The fellow could see I was attempting to settle to my documents, but still persisted in trying to draw me out. I suppose he had noticed the label on my bag, for he volunteered the information that he also was going to Toulouse. By this time I was really exasperated, and this gave me my opening.

"My dear sir," I exclaimed sarcastically, "it is not of the slightest interest to me whether you are going to Toulouse or Toulon; but allow me to remark that your tongue is both too loose and too long for the liking of one who is trying to read."

That shut him up, and he proceeded then to inflict his atrocious French on the only other occupant of the compartment, an artistic-looking young man in slouch hat and flowing bow-tie, who was deep in an unblushing perusal of that frivolous publication, *Paris Music-Hall*. Only receiving a curt "*Je n' veux pas parler*," from that worthy, however, the voluble tourist at last mercifully relapsed into silence and studied the scenery.

Toulouse at last. Out of the long string of hotels across the quaint Languedoc Canal, facing the station, I at length voted for the comfortable and moderate Hotel Terminus, and having settled my bag there, allowed myself to be led round the city by Baedeker to places of general interest, reserving

the Cathedral, museum, and other spots calling for more accurate information, till I should have run Father Saloux to earth.

As anticipated, I found the learned churchman in the ancient library next morning. On reading Father Manson's letter, he at once declared himself at my service, and began by immediately getting the archivist's permission for me to inspect any of the records I wished during my stay—an assent given with that ready courtesy common to scholars the world over. Then :

"Monsieur will doubtless wish to visit the headquarters of that curious oligarchy of old Toulouse, the Capitole, which has some fine work of the Henri IV period ?"

Monsieur most certainly did—though thinking it a little curious that a father of the Church should not have wanted to haul him off to see the fine cathedral before anything else ; but perhaps, I reflected, he is reserving that for the crowning glory.

Father Saloux took my arm and steered me along most charmingly, in his element at finding a fellow-student, and discoursing rapidly on this and that object of interest as we threaded the narrow streets whose every stone breathes history. Totally unlike the popular and inaccurate English idea of a French *cure*, he was the reverse of portly ; of monastic but kindly features, he possessed a spare frame and height which gave him a stride with which I was a little exercised to keep pace.

When we had done justice to the museum and the palace of the Capitouls, those curious magistrates who ruled old Toulouse as the Doges did Venice, my reverend guide piloted me down an amazing

tangle of crooked and narrow alleys ; to enumerate all the buildings we inspected would make this narration sound too much like a *Guide Bleu*, and the reader would not thank me for it ; but there was one particularly glorious old street which, full as it was from end to end with carved renaissance doorways, will ever remain in my memory, by reason of the events, so soon to happen, connected with one particular house in it.

Before the doorway to the courtyard of this residence, carved with even greater richness of detail than its neighbours, we halted.

“This house,” said Father Saloux, “is one of which the guide books make no mention whatever. It is called hereabouts, *La Maison d’Enfer*, the House of Hell, and from what I can piece together of the story, that appellation is entirely and grimly justified.

“Documents, including the title-deeds of the property,” he went on, “show it to have been built for, and occupied by, one Amaury de Moissac, who died in 1563, and who apparently took his name from the little town of Moissac in this Département—not more than a few kilometres from our city.

“This individual was no true son of the Church. In addition to what I consider the idiotic and money-wasting pursuit of alchemy, he indulged in the blacker arts, and many queer tales have come down in local legend concerning his doings.

“Of these, his last, which seems to have proved fatal, is the most bizarre of all ; I have seen the contemporary relation of it, set down by a Canon of St. Sernin (as there was a scandal and a public inquiry) in a manuscript privately-owned, which

I hope one day to secure for our archives."

Father Salous unearthed from his cassock, and charged up with the evil-smelling *caporal* of France, a huge Dutch porcelain pipe and gazed meditatively at a grotesque carving over the doorway before proceeding.

"Well," he said, "according to this document, Amaury de Moissac carried on some of his necrological experiments actually in the crypt of St. Sernin, which you have yet to see, a spot where there is, as you have doubtless read, a great number of holy relics.

"There seems no doubt that the sacristan of the time was as much an apostate as the sorcerer, who, it came out, had at divers times bribed him with considerable sums not only to provide access to the cathedral by night, but also to procure from the churchyard human bones, and even freshly-buried bodies, for these unholy proceedings.

"Amaury is alleged in our manuscript—this being the view of the canons and Capitouls in their joint inquiry when the affair reached its climax—to have actually tried to raise some of the spirits of the saints whose bones repose in the rich caskets you will see around the crypt. Why he should have chosen such difficult subjects to deal with as sanctified souls, instead of those of the criminal and the unshriven, I can't quite see, unless, indeed, he was attempting to triumph over this barrier."

The priest looked very grave for a moment, then :

"My friend, if that be so, Amaury is the first sorcerer I ever heard of who attempted it—and I have made a deep study of the abominations performed by men like Gilles de Rais and the Abbé

Guibourg.

“Anyhow, whatever the truth of that, we shall never know, because Moissac was found dead in the cathedral crypt next morning, with the beaten-gold lid of one of the reliquaries over his face. It is evident what his purpose had been, for beside him on the floor stood a bowl of pig’s blood, which filthy liquid was a favourite medium of the necromancers for raising the evil elemental spirits.”

“*Was, Father?*” I put in, my first interruption of his story, “it still is!”

“Well, well, I know nothing of modern practical diabolism,” the priest smiled, “but the present tenant of Amaury de Moissac’s house does not seem to be any better than the original owner. The neighbours allege that he too is given to strange practices, and he is the first person to have stopped in the place for years ; no-one could live here owing to the evil influence they said they felt.”

From its external appearance, I thought as we strolled round the sunlit courtyard admiring the delicate carvings (which had only one or two grotesque heads here and there) and the fine coats of arms, one would never have suspected the residence of so unsavoury a reputation.

It was now lunch-time, and my hospitable guide insisted on my joining him in a simple but ample meal which soon dispelled the unhealthy memory of Amaury. After this, we spent the afternoon finishing off the minor ‘sights’ of the city, and about five o’clock, turned our steps in the direction of the Cathedral of St. Saturnin.

Arrived in its square, we spent half an hour book-hunting in that curious market which offers every

conceivable object from old spectacles to a bicycle-wheel or a first edition, laid out on the pavement in front of the Porte Miégeville, and I was able to interest my host by describing our English parallels to it, Petticoat Lane and the "Caledonian."

When at last we did set foot in the cathedral, after successfully negotiating the row of beggars who perpetually line the path to the main entrance all day and night, I realised why Father Saloux had reserved this as the culminating treat, for Saint-Sernin is one of the finest Romanesque churches in existence—in fact, the inaugurator of a particular style. The eastern part dates from 1080 ; it is immeasurably superior to anything of the period in England, and even in northern France, Jumièges (on which a few of our English Norman fanes are modelled) is but a feeble shadow of the Toulouse original.

Luckily, there were hardly any visitors, and almost before we realised it, three hours of this long summer evening had been spent in our enthusiastic examination of the architectural detail. It was the carillon playing the half-hour chime of *Ave Maria de Lourdes* which, breaking in on our subdued conversation, recalled us to our watches, which registered half-past eight.

This brought the priest back to earth with a slight shock. He regretted having to leave Monsieur Wayne so unceremoniously, but he was in danger of losing the last train to his village, and he must get back there, for he had parish duties of pressing urgency on the morrow. On the day after, however, he would again be at my service at the Library, at ten in the morning.

I thanked the courteous old priest warmly, and stood at the main door watching him vanish across the square in his long, jerky stride, hoping he would not miss his train on my account.

Then I turned back, intending just to complete my inspection of the choir and apse from the point where the carillon had interrupted our tour, and to take another look at the crypt, to which we had paid only small attention an hour or so before, as there had been a number of Provençal pilgrims in it at the time and we had not wished to disturb them at their devotions.

When in England we speak of a crypt, we generally associate the word with a dark, subterranean vault under a church, full of bones, as at Hythe or Rothwell. The crypt of St. Sernin, however, is nothing like that ; indeed, it is rather curiously constructed. As in most continental churches—and some English cathedrals—you walk round the back of the choir and high altar, in what is called the ambulatory. At Toulouse, the crypt is built here, half above ground and half below, under the altar, which is considerably raised ; thus one can see down into the crypt through iron grilles set like doors at the ground-floor level of the ambulatory.

Between these grilles, one of which serves as the entrance-gate to the short flight of steps down into the crypt, is a series of blank arcades, filled with crude—almost grotesque—figures of saints carved in relief, life-size, dating from the late 12th or very early 13th century. One of them bears in its hand a scroll inscribed *Et Clamant SSSSS* ("And the saints cry aloud"). You enter the storehouse of holy relics near this figure, and exactly opposite the

allegedly-miraculous image of St. Judas Thadeus, which, as I had observed in passing that way before, is an object of considerable veneration.

When I returned after watching the hurried departure of Father Saloux, the electric light, which is switched on by the sacristan at the top of the steps, was on, and I could see a couple of people in the crypt. A grating voice reached me as I started to descend :

“Isn’t this gold box just too wonderful ?”

It was our garrulous tourist of the train, who in his wanderings had apparently picked up another of his tribe. He did not see me, thank heaven, and went on making the round of the relics with his companion, continuing to utter a plethora of senseless superlatives.

Recalling the interesting information give me by Father Manson, I began by looking round for the “exiled” remains of the two English saints, and very soon found those of St. Edmund—not a difficult matter, as the relics are in large caskets for the most part, arranged round the crypt in alcoves, each reliquary being fashioned in the model of a church, of exquisite work and gilding. One of the two I sought proved to be in a corner to the right at the foot of the steps, and I found beside it a large framed card, hung on the jamb of the alcove, which I translate :

Saint Edmund, King of England. He was martyred by the Danes in 870 A.D. ‘My religion is dearer to me than life. I shall never consent to offend the God I adore,’ he said when dying. His body was brought from England by Louis VIII. When he became king, he gave it to the Canons of St-Sernin in return for their hospitality during

the siege he made at Toulouse against the Albigensian heretics, circa 1225 A.D. In 1631 the town of Toulouse was delivered from the plague, after a vow made to Saint-Edmund. His feast-day is 20 November.

As these details related to the Albigensian war, the very subject that had brought me down to the city, I took down in my notebook a complete copy of the printed card. "At any rate," I thought whimsically, "the good saint seems to have repaid amply the hospitality accorded to his tired bones."

Then I soon came across the casket containing the relics of the other Englishman, Saint Gilbert of Sempringham, which, like the rest of the series, is a masterpiece of medieval craftsmanship. Here the label informed visitors that the good abbot was persecuted by Henry II for taking up the cause of Thomas à Becket, and that his body also was brought to St. Sernin by Louis VIII, to whom Henry "presented" it.

In justice to the memory of that enterprising French prince, I ought to point out that modern English writers deny that he carried off the mortal remains of Edmund, because they were enclosed in a new shrine by Henry III some fifty years after the alleged abduction to France. So one country or the other has some bones not those of the person they purport to be—a sad fact too often encountered in the wanderings of relics! However, I am quite convinced, in the light of what was to happen to me, that France does in this case really possess the genuine article.

By the time I had finished jotting down the information on the tickets, the two tourists had gone,

and I was left alone in the atmosphere of sanctified death. I thought I saw the sacristan standing at the top of the steps waiting to put out the light, but on closer inspection it proved to be only a 13th-century vestment, the chasuble of St. Pierre de Vérome (a purely local celebrity,) in excellent preservation ; and beside it was framed another, that of St. Hippolyte, martyr.

As I turned back from looking at these, I could not repress a shudder at the thought of old Amaury de Moissac lying there at the foot of the steps with his bowl of blood, nearly four centuries ago ; and I fell to musing, as one does in such an atmosphere.

Could so evil an influence still haunt so holy a spot ? What had Amaury actually been trying to achieve ? What had happened here on that fatal night in 1563 ?

What would happen to me, for instance, if I attempted to make off with any of these bones, teeth, or shreds of venerated rag-and-bones in general ? Though far too sceptical, as a historian, ever to make a good Catholic, I found myself recalling seriously, and without a qualm of shame, Father Manson's remark so casually and innocently made : "It is a great pity that our two holy men should be exiled from the scene of their labours."

"Good heavens, what utter nonsense," I told myself sharply. "You, Gregory Wayne, M.A., F.S.A., ex-Fellow of your College and leading authority on early English history, thinkng of stealing bones from a French church to give to an English one. You're getting morbid or going senile, my boy, that's what's the matter with you."

Shaking off the idea with a laugh which echoed in

a nasty, sardonic way that I am sure does not represent my normally pleasant expression of mirth, I crossed the vault to inspect a lovely breviary printed in 1544, and above it a glass case containing a church vestment alleged to have been the property of St. Dominic and, if so, more than 700 years old, since the Dominican founder died in 1221.

I was in the middle of a detailed examination of the fabric, so far as is possible with a reflecting glass case, when suddenly there was a clash of iron grating, and the light went out. It was so unexpected that it took me a few moments to realise what had happened.

The old sacristan, thinking everyone had gone, had locked the gate, then switched off the light. Plunging up against the kneeling-stools and other impedimenta of the place, barking my shins on a bench in my haste, I made a frantic dash for the steps ; forgetting for the moment where I was, I yelled in English at the top of my voice : "Hi! Verger! You've locked me in!"

Neither that nor any other language was the slightest bit of use. The guardian of the shrine was extremely deaf, old and infirm. By screwing my head round the grille and squinting sideways, I could just see him locking the gates of the ambulatory, level with the choir-aisle, then hobbling off into the fast-gathering gloom of the vast nave. Yell and whistle as I might, he failed to hear.

The full unpleasantness of my position now dawned on me. Here I was, foodless since lunch-time ("tea" being non-existent as a meal in rural France) let in for a night-long vigil and fast in the silent uncheerful company of those who—I then

innocently thought—for ever sleep.

Then, nerve-shattering in that grim stillness as of the tomb, there crashed forth the hour from the great tower almost above my head. Clang—clang—clang—ten merciless booms that reverberated through the mighty cathedral, shivered the very stones of it, travelling round the circular wall of my prison and coming to rest in an eerie echo to the accompaniment of vibrating glass frames.

It seemed to last a century, that telling of the clock. I shuddered in sympathy with the loose frames, till there followed an anodyne in the full Ave Maria from the carillon—at least, in other circumstances it would have been a relief, but here it only added to my depression.

A—ve Ma—ri—a gra—ti—a ple—na . . . How slow it was, that carillon! Would the damned noise never cease? Cease at last it did, and when the whispering silence again reigned supreme, I even felt sorry, for it was not Virgil's "friendly silence of the moon," but the menacing full silence of deep shades.

After a time I got more used to it, and, groping my way to the bench on which I had barked my shins, sat down to consider what was to be done, thanking my stars it was, at least, not winter. "Stay here all night you cannot," I told myself firmly, thinking aloud.

"Stay here all night you will," mocked the echoes of my prison.

Desperately I got up again, determined to make a systematic attempt to find some weakness in part of the grille-work, starting with its gate; the only result of that was that I ruined a good penknife,

my sole weapon, since historians do not usually travel round cathedrals burglariously armed. The lock proved unpickable with my knife.

Then to my discomfiture I found that all the grilles were on the level of the top step, which ruled out all save the two either side of the entrance ; the rest were inaccessible, with sheer smooth wall below them to the floor of the crypt. Five minutes of tugging at the two I could reach sufficed to make me beat an undignified retreat to my bench and curse the efficiency of the medieval smiths.

Rendered inactive again, musing soon got the upper hand of me. "Well," I thought, "since you are here for the night, you fool, you must make the best of it."

I started trying to repeat the stuff in the Ingoldsby Legends about the Jackdaw of Rheims who "at last in the odour of sanctity died," but it was no use. Again and again, there recurred to my head, with increasing intensity, the insidious thought :

It is a great pity . . . those bodies of Englishmen . . . exiled.

Half-past ten. Half of that infernal Ave Maria was inflicted on me again. I have hated carillons with an inflexible hate ever since.

After all . . . a golden opportunity . . . Who was to know ? What would be the loss of a few bones in this charnel-house so richly stored with saintly relics ? . . . Slip out when they open up in the early morning . . . Catholic churches are early astir . . . Get taken for one of the pilgrims.

My train of thought grew steadily more and more dishonest and disastrous. My eyes strayed with fatal persistence first to the black handbag contain-

ing my notebooks, then to the gloom of the far corner, which I knew held the feretory of St. Edmund.

The bones would easily go in the bag. I could give them to Father Manson, explaining that I had begged them from the Canons through Father Saloux.

The idea grew upon me. I opened my hand-bag. I tiptoed to the top of the steps, with ears strained for any sound of other human presence in the forest of stone around me. None there was ; the stillness was only broken by the strange night-noises I associated, in my growing confidence, with owls and bats in the clerestory and tower.

Descending again, I braced myself for what I was about to do, telling myself this was not sacrilege, but restitution ; my heart was thudding audibly in the deep silence, but I suddenly cast off all effort to square my conscience, or reason about the matter, and stepped boldly forward to the little shrine in the corner, feeling about until I could trace under my fingers the outline of the beautiful church-shaped reliquary of beaten gold.

It was fastened, but a little gentle straining at the centuries-old locks resulted in the cover coming open. The lid was surprisingly heavy, feeling as if the body of it were made of lead under the gold plates, and I had to get both hands under the join to raise it.

Then the thing happened. The ponderous mass flew suddenly up out of my grasp, the lid crashed back against the wall, gaping full open, and I was blinded by a terrible flash as of blue lightning striking a bright surface.

Before I could recover my balance, something

rushed down on me from above, clutching me by the throat with cold, bony fingers, and hurling me with terrific force to the far side of the crypt.

I fetched up with a crash against a heavy glass frame which, I somehow remembered in a flash, was displayed against the wall and contained the vestment of St. Dominic.

It smashed to atoms, falling all over me and cutting me badly about the face . . . and I lay still, numbed with shock, paralysed with fear, for the ancient garment within the frame, musty with the odour of centuries, was wrapping about my face, smothering me.

Desperately I regained the use of my limbs, fought the thing off, and managed to stagger to my feet.

I was not a moment too soon. The vestment was floating about menacingly over my head, assuming the stature of a man, filling out.

The casket, from which some strange force had repulsed me—there it lay, bathed in a faint rosy light, which my confused subconscious mind identified in some bizarre way with the Venusberg. Its lid lay still open, and with a horrible clatter of bone upon bone, a Thing was arising from it.

The air was becoming full of a filthy odour of *pig's blood* and human corruption, the red light was swelling, filling the crypt.

A scrabbling, shuffling sound made me take my eyes for a moment off the immediate menace of the dithering vestment above my head, towards the steps. I saw in a frenzy of horror that the chasuble of St. Pierre de Vérome was coming down towards me—and it was clothing a fearful frame, a travesty of rotting human flesh with the bones sticking

through.

I could not scream. I crouched down behind the bench, but a blast of icy wind pushed me over on to my back, and within two inches of my mouth there came a cruel laugh *from two rows of hideous blackened teeth* minus the rest of the skull, floating in mid-air above a row of vertebrae.

By a horrible freak of imagination, I seemed to see the labels attached to the relics : "Teeth of Saint Eutrope, bishop and martyr," "Vertebræ of Saint Joanna of Toulouse." I knew without daring to turn round that the jewelled cases behind me, which had contained them, were empty.

Slowly I witnessed this awful resurrection of the Things from the grave. The bones of Edmund were now clambering out of their casket ; they shook into life, rattled into place one upon another, clacked and capered round the floor within a foot of me, and entered the prancing gown of St. Dominic.

A heterogeneous skeleton materialised out of the flying fragments of Joanna, Raymond, Hippolyte, and a half-dozen more of the sainted dead.

The lid of St. Gilbert's depository flew open, and from it issued yet another mockery of the human shape . . . The relics of the bishop Eutrope and the virgin Joanna whirled about in the rose-tinted glow until their bones were covered with the shape of a naked woman, her form one of breath-taking beauty till one saw the maggots falling from her mouth and swarming in both breasts. Round her neck hung the gold chain of St. Orens, and as she minced nearer and nearer, her body gave out an unspeakable stench.

Then arose the most fearful music, surely, that

ever fell upon mortal ears, a symposium of a dozen Danses Macabres and Valses Tristes, but more obscene than ever Sibelius or Saint-Saens dared dream, a music composed by Satan himself, that could only have been played by the bony fingers of the damned on violins strung with human gut.

The dreadful concatenation of priestly-robed skeletons, the nude, diseased Joanna-Eutrope in their midst, began a dance unspeakably foul . . . Two of the figures pulled me to my feet and dragged me into that circle of corruption. Wilder and wilder sped the music, now seductive, now a travesty of the holy offices ; more and more corybantic waxed the dance ; and as it reached its horrible climax, the whole circle of grinning heads began to chant the *Te Deum Laudamus* to a ribald tune of the old jongleurs, the while some of the fleshless frames accompanied the rhythm with a castanet-like clatter of forearm on rib-bone.

Round and round we went . . . a witches' sabbath far surpassing anything described by the mediæval imagination. The last thing I clearly remember is that as I made one desperate, final effort to ward off the grisly clutch of St. Edmund on my right, and the choking shroud of St. Gilbert that wrapped me foetidly round on the left, I let out a fearful scream and pushed frantically with one hand into the rotting mass of Joanna-Eutrope's face as it circled nearer and nearer to give me the fatal kiss of Hell. I fainted . . .

I came to my senses with a shiver, to find myself lying on the cold floor of the crypt with a grey-green dawn streaking in from the eastern windows of the ambulatory far above.

With aching head, I tried to recall the events of the nightmare and to persuade myself that it had been a dream—but to no purpose.

Not only did my face feel stiff and sore, and reveal three nasty cuts when I managed to inspect it by using as a mirror what was left of a smashed frame—itself clear evidence—but *from one of the cuts I extracted three crawling maggots, and on the floor was a deep stain, still wet, of putrefying animal blood.*

More, the ancient vestment was on the floor, on the far side from its broken frame ; and my handbag was crammed to the rim with human bones. I looked in a horrified daze across to the feretory of St. Edmund. Its lid lay open back to the wall, and from the edge of the casket protruded grotesquely a thigh-bone, as though the occupant had thrust out a leg to arise.

Slowly, painfully, I got to my feet, and my first act was to replace from my bag the coffer's relics, reverently closing the lid and fastening the catches in place. Then, realising I must at all costs avoid being found here by the sacristan with the broken frame as the evidence, I adjusted the vestment as well as I could and pushed the smashed glass into a dark corner.

Recollecting that on my entry the previous evening I had noticed a holy-water stoup at the top of the steps, I crawled up them, intending to clean up my face as well as possible with its aid and a handkerchief; but it was empty. Had it not been, I doubt if the terrible events of the night would have happened.

So I used my handkerchief alone, and then hid myself in one of the recesses out of direct range of

sight from the door-grille, and waited patiently for my release.

Six o'clock . . . seven o'clock . . . two hours passed by, twice the carillon sang forth in praise of Mary, full of grace. At last, however, a muffled sound of activity above broke in upon my confinement. The early Masses were beginning, and I heard a jingling of keys about the ambulatory and the side-chapels.

At long last fortune favoured me. I think it was about half-past eight when the ancient servant of the cathedral admitted a party of pilgrim peasants to the crypt. Never since have I been so grateful for the sound of key turning in lock. I let the good people get round to the far side of the place, and then, judging that the sacristan would have had time to shuffle away from the entrance, slunk quietly out.

Even at this early hour there were a few visitors, or rather devotees, at the miraculous shrine of St. Judas Thadeus opposite the door. Half-apprehensively, I took a final glance at the crude but saintly sculptures which had so interested me on the previous evening.

Then light dawned upon me, for there, over the round-arched entrance to the crypt steps, was cut in Lombardic lettering something I had not noticed in the dim evening light. It was a Latin legend :

Vigilantes Sunt Qui Custodiunt Locum

“So that explains it,” I muttered, softly translating to myself the words : *Vigilant are they who guard the Place.*

Rapidly, with my head lowered to conceal my

ravaged features, I strode down the aisle and gained the open square and the healthy sunshine, uttering as I went a prayer for the repose of Amaury de Moissac's troubled soul.

This by all artistic standards should be the fitting end to an incredible story of the Unknown ; but I am a historian, not an artist, and there is a sequel, of profound interest to students of the occult.

I was able of course, to explain away my gashes to the good Father Saloux, saying I had tripped on the rough cobbles ; and as there is in Toulouse no screaming Press publicity—or, the cathedral authorities may have known what they possess bottled up in that crypt, and so kept a discreet silence about the damage—I was able to finish my documentary notes in peace.

Now, on my return to England a few day later, I related my terrible experience as nearly as possible to my colleague Granville and Father Manson, concluding (addressing myself mainly to the priest :)

“So in the circumstances, you had better give up all idea of any attempt to get these relics translated to England.”

“Hm !” Granville remarked quietly when I had done, “If I had known you were going to take the Father’s remark so seriously, Gregs, I’d have put you on your guard. Evidently you are woefully deficient in a knowledge of saint-lore.”

He crossed over to a corner where the red covers of Methuen’s “Antiquary’s Books” series stand in noble array, and fished down J. C. Wall’s volume, *Shrines of British Saints*.

“Listen to this, both of you,” he said, and read :
“William of Malmesbury tells us that Abbot

Leoffston was curious as to the appearance of St. Edmund's body, and in 1050 he opened the chest and found it in a perfect state ; but he is said to have been severely punished for his temerity. The saint also visited correction on others who failed to behave with becoming reverence in his church. Osgoth, a Danish nobleman, disparaged the memory of St. Edmund, and walked disdainfully round the shrine, for which he was deprived of his reason until brought in contrition to the feretory."

THE HAUNTED DRAWERS

“Nasty-looking piece of handwriting, Alan,” I remarked to my colleague Granville at breakfast one misty September morning, handing over a letter I had just slit open and perused.

“Hm! Rather,” he rejoined as, with a mouth full of toast, he squinted to decipher the address. “Looks like a person of violent temper plus rakish temperament. What’s he want, anyway? I hate reading letters!”

I interpreted and deciphered for him.

“Dear Sir, (it ran) “Having heard of your historical researches from an old friend, Professor Dinton, who was at Oxford with you, and whom I have not seen for years until recently, I wonder if you would care to inspect my family archives. I have charters going back (I am told, for of course I cannot read the things) to the thirteenth century concerning this property, which has been actually in my family since the middle of the fifteenth. I can offer you and your colleague (as I understand you have one) hospitality, and shall welcome your advice about what to do with all these documents, since I hear there is now some law about preserving them. If there is any fee attached to your inspection I shall be glad to pay it.

Yours faithfully,

H. Alberic Sharman.”

“Alberic!” said Alan, “Sounds like something out of Wagner’s Ring Cycle, doesn’t it? From where

does he write?"

"That," I replied, "seems a more difficult matter than the rest of his epistle. So far as I can make out, it looks like Rockington Manor—it's Rock-something manor, anyhow—Bedfordshire. I don't know it, but—

"Yes, yes, I do," my colleague interrupted. "I did some Bedfordshire records once in which it was mentioned. It's not far from the north border of Bucks., Newport Pagnell way."

"You know I hate travelling, Gregs," he added, "so fix up to go down on your own if you want to. It's probably the usual run of manorial documents, and you can tell me if there is anything particularly, in my line, or worth any joint work on it."

"All right then, I will," I agreed, for I had been engaged in close work of late, and felt the change would clear away the cobwebs. "The fellow seems quite generous, offering lodgings and a fee—but I must say I agree with you about his writing."

So it came about that a few days later, after a prompt exchange of correspondence, I found myself driving through the mournful flats that lie south of that forsaken hole Market Harborough, and down Northants, to Rockington.

My host was awaiting me, and somewhat belied his calligraphy. He was a big, red-faced person, a typical squire-farmer, and he certainly gave me a very good lunch before carting me off to a hay-loft where, to my horror as a historian, his precious family archives were stored. I spent a happy afternoon weeding them out, and found that he had not been misinformed as to the great age of the manorial charters, connected as they were with several im-

portant local abbeys.

Farm-duties calling him, my host was not in to tea, but sent his excuses by the maid who served me in solitary state in a somewhat severe Queen Anne drawing-room.

Coming down dressed for dinner, Mr. Sharman met me in the hall accompanied by a vivacious brunette who was obviously his daughter, and who was attired in a skin-tight jade-green evening dress which showed far more than it covered.

"Mr. Wayne, the historian, m'dear—Eva, my daughter," he announced in his curious, jerky way of speaking. "Wife's dead. I have a son, but he's not here. Come on in. Dinner's ready." I silently thanked heaven there were no barbarous cocktails in this old house.

Over dinner my host was keenly anxious to know what I had found in his manuscripts, and I was rather surprised to find that Eva showed an interest in the subject quite out of keeping with her ultra-modern attire and rather bubbling manner. By the time dessert was reached, I had secured Mr. Sharman's promise that his archives should be presented to the fine county muniment-rooms Bedfordshire has set up.

"You historical blokes must come across some queer things," remarked Miss Eva, in that appalling mixture of slang plus educated interest, which the modern young woman seems able to combine. "I mean, all sorts of fascinating dead memories, and that kind of thing. No, Dad, I'm not going to leave you men to guff over the port, besides I like port myself, so I'll stay," (this, as we had made a gesture to rise.)

We sat down again, her father with a curious twisted grin, but saying nothing.

"F'r instance," went on the astonishing Eva in a sudden gush, "do you know my drawers are haunted?"

I nearly choked in my port with bachelor embarrassment, just managing to splutter, "Er—I beg your pardon?"

"Oh Lord, I don't mean what you think!" she exploded with frank amusement. "Never wear the things—no, I mean a *chest* of drawers in my bedroom."

The information she had just conveyed as to attire was quite superfluous, from the merest glance at her costume, I thought, but I made no comment. I was getting used to waiting for shocks with this young woman.

The next, however, came from her father, who was now staring moodily into the fire and idly caressing the head of a huge Great Dane which, he had remarked, always sat at his feet at dinner.

"You'd better tell Mr. Wayne, Eva," he said, slowly for him. "He'll have to know anyway, if he comes across any Georgian letters in his search."

Scenting something unusual here in the way of a family skeleton in the cupboard, I remarked tactfully:

"Well, one does occasionally come across things that are puzzling in connection with the past in that way, Miss Sharman."

"Then here goes," she replied, moving from the table and flopping into a fireside settee, while lighting up a cigarette.

"You must know that there's a queer, wild strain in our family. I know I've got it. Dad says I'm

a disgraceful harum-scarum and will probably finish up in a strange bed, other occupant hitherto unknown! It's worse in the sons. My brother ran off with a chorus-girl while a student at London University, and the last we heard of him was they were living together in Paris. Dad made a runaway marriage at Gretna with Mother ; and his father painted late Victorian London red—too late for your periods, no doubt, but he was the fellow that coshed a policeman on the head and then rode round Piccadilly in a nightshirt and bed-cap with the copper strapped on the back of his racehorse.

"Anyway, back in the 18th century, the family tradition says, the eldest son at one time was such a disgrace that he was turned out by the squire and only came home when he was dying and starving. Then, they say, the squire did the Prodigal Son stunt over him, but too late, as he most inconsiderately died in the house that night.

"They say my bedroom, was the room he died in and it's been haunted ever since.

"Haunted that damn room certainly is. There's an ancient chest of drawers in one corner of it, and every night invisible feet are heard tramping upstairs, then the whole contents of this chest are flung out. It's a curious bit of furniture—drawers below, and a kind of secretaire at the top. An antique dealer who saw it said it was a rare piece, date about 1730 or so.

"What's even more weird," she went on, after gulping another glass of port at a draught—how that girl could drink the stuff—"is that several times we've tried moving it and putting another piece of furniture in the corner, and whatever is put there gets

treated the same way. Only a fortnight ago—you remember that very hot week we had in August—we tried a shift-round, moving the chest to a spare room next door and putting my bed in the corner.

“I got home about 1 a.m. from a party, to find the whole of the bedclothes violently tossed about all over the floor ; made the bed again as best I could—being a bit soured—and would you believe it, about 3 a.m. I was awakened to find myself lying naked on the sheet, with the top sheet and coverlet on the floor, and I could feel hands pulling the rest from under me. I yanked on the bedside standard lamp—but bless your life, never a sign of anybody in the room. So back goes my bed out of danger next night, and we left the corner bare.

“That night, I woke again, to hear vicious scrabbling in the corner, and the following morning, behold a series of nail-scratchings right down my dinky wallpaper. What d’you make of it ?”

“Hm!” I said after reflection, “it hardly comes within the province of a worker among documents, but I think one may hazard a guess—that the disturbance is intimately, and indeed only, connected with that one piece of furniture, and that one spot.

“I don’t suppose,” I added, “you have ever read a rather heavy work published in America by a student of the occult, T. Jay Hudson, about fifty years ago—in 1892, to be exact—called *The Law of Psychic Phenomena* ?”

“Good Lord, no!” exclaimed Eva, but rather surprisingly, her father who now stirred for the first time since her recital began, put in :—

“I have just been reading it, Mr. Wayne, and I have the very book here. That is exactly why

I asked you to come down, though I didn't want to give any impression of 'ghost-hunting' in my letter. I thought that as a worker among old records you would probably have considerable knowledge of *secret hiding-places*."

He emphasised these words, and went on :

"I know what you are going to remark, and you seem to have hit upon the same idea as myself. Hudson's theory, my dear," (turning to Eva) "is that so-called ghosts are thought-forms that have lived on, as it were, being projected from the subconscious brain, at the point of death, of persons dying in circumstances of great stress.

"Thus, I have an idea that when the 18th-century prodigal son—named, like myself, Alberic Sharman—was dying, his subconscious personality sent out (without his consciously knowing it, of course) a thought of horror as to what would happen if some incriminating secret he alone knew, which lay hidden in that chest and secretaire, were discovered ; and that this thought-form has persisted so strongly, that it is translated into material energy—a kind of electrical wave of some violence—which takes the shape of the attack on that object."

"Mr. Sharman," I said gravely, "you have touched on a very deep subject, and I must say you are one of the few men I have yet met, who do realise that there is this scientific way of looking at what most people term haunting. I gather, then, that what you want me to do is to search that chest and see if we cannot put a stop to what has evidently become a very material nuisance to the household?"

"I do!" he exclaimed with sudden and astonishing fervour. "My dear sir, I feel that there is a kind of

cursed streak in the family line somehow, and that if this is settled, it will not occur in future generations—I am not a vain man, but I am proud of my long line, and I want to see it go on—in honour ; more honour than I or my son have given it.”

“Well,” said young Eva, breaking with a woman’s intuition what threatened to be an uncomfortable tension, “I’m fed up with these disturbed nights ever since I got home from Coll. for the long vac., so if a bachelor scholar won’t faint at a girl’s bedroom, come on up and do the exorcising right now.”

Concealing a wince at the mixture of suggestiveness and slang that appeared to be this young woman’s notable characteristics, I consented, and we formed a procession up the gracious old staircase to a great wide room of the early Georges which, by violent contrast, was in very modern feminine disorder.

“There,” said Eva pointing dramatically to the corner facing the door, “is the offending furniture.”

It was certainly a very rare piece, if not a unique one. I must have looked inquiringly as to whether it was in order for me to begin operations.

“Oh, carry on,” she laughed, “I don’t mind you seeing my wardrobe!”

So we went to it, the young wretch obviously enjoying my embarrassment as I struggled with the slithery piles of silk stockings, under-slips and garters, which were all the drawers contained.

I subjected each empty drawer in turn to most careful scrutiny and tapping, besides making minute measurements, but could find no space unaccounted for, there or in the framework.

“As a matter of fact,” I remarked, “I did not for

a minute expect we should have any luck with that part—but there *was* just the chance that a Georgian cabinet-maker had played a trick and put a secret drawer in the unlikely portion.”

When I turned my attention to the top, or secretaire part, however, after getting the owner to remove a litter of bills and what looked suspiciously like a packet of boys’ photographs and love-letters, evidence was soon forthcoming as to a concealed receptacle. When you have worked on many old bureaux, you somehow sense these things. It took some ten minutes of pressing at various portions of the structure, including knobs and carving, however, before I finally hit on the right one, which sent a cunning panel sliding back to reveal quite a deep cavity.

In this lay a packet of papers yellow with age, and musty with long exile from the air. I took them carefully out and handed them to Mr. Sharman.

“Thank you, Mr. Wayne,” he said with a sad little smile, and the suspicion of a sigh. “I think we’d better take these downstairs and see, with the aid of a decanter, what my ancestor was up to.”

This time we adjourned to the library, and while my host was producing whisky and soda, I had just time for a rapid glance, and was surprised to see the cultured type of books my host possessed, obviously in use.

Over the desk, Mr. Sharman almost reverently undid a faded tape and, motioning his daughter and myself to take some, began to open up the letters. It was as we had suspected ; when we got them into order of date, we read a story sordid and brutal indeed even for the eighteenth century, an age not

over-given to sympathy by the land-owning class for all whom it considered to be below it.

Young Alberic Sharman, it transpired, had got a local farmer's daughter into trouble in 1738. These were her letters of desperate appeal to him ; from them we gathered that his father would turn him out if it became known, and that he had broken the news to her and told her roughly that she must trouble him no more.

Here—I could almost see her writing it, numbed with cold and fear, on the dark December night of 1738 whose date it bore—was her last frantic appeal :

Mine own Deare one,

Yr letter hath come to me by or man Thomas this day. How can you soe treat me, whoe hath given all, and thinke yo: that the matter can be hid for when my Childe cometh twill fall upon the Parrish and soe bring Shame unto us all ; soe that 'fore God it will avail you naught of hideing from yr Father. Being thus casst aside and nowe scarce dareing to be seen abroad, this to Lett you know I'll no more trouble you. Search you the Morrowe in Long Pond and yo: shall find me and be it ever uppon yr Consiense.

Farewel for I doe yet Love thee, Mary

“Poor devils, both of ‘em,” said the Squire, refilling our glasses, “so that was why he went away, eh ? You can see Long Pond from Eva’s window in daylight.”

The ebullient Eva herself was for once reduced to silence, and I, accustomed as I am to the revelations of family scandal in old letters, did not break

the hush. Who could remain unaffected by this living tragedy of two centuries ago ? At last :

“What are we going to do about it ?” demanded my host.

“Well,” I replied, “you know, and like myself appear to agree with, Hudson’s theory of haunting. I suggest that if you burn these letters, you will never be troubled by the unquiet spirit again ; it seems to me evident that when your ancestor was dying, some part of his subconscious brain sent fourth the thought : ‘My God, what if someone finds those letters, and my folly and shame are revealed ?’ ”

“I do think,” I added, “that this thought has persisted in intensity—for what we call Time is purely a convention—and takes the form of the violent nightly disturbance, the frantic search of the drawers.”

We carried the tragic papers to the library fire and solemnly consigned them to it.

To stay up talking after this would have been an anticlimax, and with one accord we said goodnight.

At breakfast Eva reported, with all her old *verve*, that she had slept undisturbed and that it was “quite a change not to be stripped by someone you *couldn’t* see.”

I spent another very pleasant day with the Squire’s archives, and made arrangements with him for their transfer to Bedford ; only yesterday there came a delightful invitation from Eva to go down and spend a week-end with them, recalling my visit of a year ago and ending, characteristically :

“My drawers have remained unhaunted ever since.”

A NUN'S TRAGEDY

"Of course, it's a very moot point, Alan," I wound up my side of an argument my colleague and I had been having on church architecture, "but I think you ought to concede that the Chapter House of Bledburn Abbey, Rutland, is the finest example we have of Gothic foliage-sculpture in this country. You would be convinced, if only you'd come and have a look at it again. I have to visit Bledburn some time next week to see those ecclesiastical records, so why not come with me then?"

Thus it was, mainly as the result of this technical dispute, that my fellow research-worker Granville and I found ourselves in that study in contrasts, Bledburn Abbey ; and I am pleased to put it on record that Alan finally admitted I was right. For my part, I had a very satisfactory day with the records, while Alan, poking about the dim corners of the vast Norman nave, collected quite a lot of data on one of his pet subjects ; the individualism of the masons, their miscalculations, and so forth.

He even pointed out to me one spot where he would have proved to the most sceptical gathering of the Society of Antiquaries that the craftsman had broken his tool while carving. Had I not known my friend's unerring accuracy so well, I should have been constrained to ask him facetiously if he could show me the spot on the parapet where the medieval plumber fell off his ladder while going back to fetch some forgotten tools for work on the lead roof!

It was one of those delightful late summer afternoons which are a compensation of the English climate, a symphony of every shade in green, when you feel it is good to be alive and cycling inconsequently along the leaf-shaded lanes, far from the maddening stream of main-road motors, and dropping at will into the doze of antique villages. That was our own mode of progress on this particular day, for our car was suffering from some internal complaint or other, and our home is not so far from the Rutland border.

The day was the more delightful because there was as yet no hint of sad September and her dying leaves : it was August 28, to be precise, a date I shall always remember, if only by reason of the contrast between all this peace and beauty, and the grim tragedy of centuries ago with which we were so soon to be acquainted.

Well, after a tea which fully supported the substantial appearance of that fine old hostelry the Turk's Head, opposite the Abbey, we decided to cycle back in the cool of the evening, it being then only five o'clock. For more reasons than one, every inch of our road will live in my memory, and I do not think Alan Granville will forget it, either. Even to this day—and the incident I am about to relate took place some years ago—I notice that whenever the subject of "sweet evening shadows" comes up, his eyes bear a flicker of horror, and he mutters something inaudible.

We set off at a leisurely pace, with frequent stoppages, occasioned sometimes by Alan's desire to inspect a battered stone by the roadside, at others by my own predilection for disappearing into ditches

and cornfields in quest of flints, so that when we had been on the road half an hour or so, our pockets resembled a miniature mason's yard.

This long-formed habit of keeping our eyes open was soon to occasion a diversion from the highway, for all at once, I caught a glimpse through the trees of a solid-looking tower on the right ; and in that glance, I saw sufficient to arouse at once a keen interest.

"Look there, Alan!" I exclaimed. "See anything peculiar about that church tower?"

"Yes," he answered at once, dismounting. "If you hadn't noticed it, I was about to draw your attention myself—it's the only example I have ever seen with what looks like an exterior *triforium* gallery round the *outside* of the tower. What is the place, anyway? I'm not well up in the villages hereabouts."

For the benefit of the layman (who is too often at the mercy of us specialists and gets left most inconsiderately in the air) I had better explain that a *triforium* is a gallery often found in large churches, particularly of Norman date, running in the thickness of the wall above the nave arches and round the transepts where such exist, but stopping at the west end of the building inside, and itself being pierced with arches. Bledburn itself has a fine example.

We got out the map on the grass, and found that we had fetched up at a place by the name of Merringby, indicated by a few scattered houses and honoured, against the church-symbol, with the legend "Priory (site of)" in that antique black-letter beloved of the Ordnance Survey to denote almost any relic.

Until that moment, we had never heard of the place, much less studied anything of its history ; we did not even know to what order belonged the vanished monastery, of which the church seemed by the map to be the only vestige—kept as a parish church at the Dissolution, as so often happened.

So while I struggled to get the map back into its pristine folds Granville, who is a bit of a madman on place-names, unfeelingly exercised his speculations on the derivation of this, a new one to us.

A few yards further on to the right, there materialised a lane, actually possessing that rarity in this part of the Midlands, a signpost, which alleged that the lane led to Merringby.

“Hm! Decayed sort of village for a church that size,” remarked Alan as we followed this lane for half a mile or so past scattered farms, the church coming and going in increasing glimpses between the trees.

“Don’t forget,” I reminded him, “that the place, like Peterborough and other examples, probably just grew up around the priory ; you can see at a glance this isn’t a mere village church.”

We were now approaching the building directly from the south, in a line with the tower, but instead of finding the usual path through a graveyard which we were seeking to indicate the entrance, we emerged rather suddenly upon a drive with a lodge at the corner, such as might have led up to the usual country manor-house ; and close to the lodge gates, trimming the neat drive, was a benevolent-looking old rustic who might have stepped straight from the pages of Thomas Hardy.

“Good-day, surs,” said he civilly as we dismounted

to inquire if we could get to the church that way
“Aye, you can coom through ’ere, for this be the
church-way. Naw, it b’aint locked, ye can get in
alreet.”

With the authority of the ancient, then, we went forward, noting that the drive branched to lead to a large residence which could be seen immediately on our right through the avenue of fine elms we were skirting. A mournful building it looked, partly of brick and part stone, half-strangled in ivy and exuding an air of rank neglect and decay.

Our very cursory examination in passing showed the house to be built in the typical polite-looking style of the mid-Georgian country mansion.

Then the trees ended and we came rather abruptly on the tower that had so excited our curiosity from the main road.

“Oh, I’ve got it!” declared Alan, “we’ve been coming up from the south, and evidently this house on the south side was built in the eighteenth century on the exact site of at least one wing of the priory—probably the cloister-plan. Now for that tower of yours.”

Putting our cycles against the last of the elms, we stepped back to get a clearer view ; and sure enough, there confronted us the most remarkable eccentricity of Gothic work I am ever likely to see, a feature of which even to-day I can find no mention in the most up-to-date testbooks on church architecture ; for we beheld the external arches of a graceful triforium gallery running right round the tower.

“What a mess!” I exclaimed. “Either your idea of a decayed village is correct, or else a wave of heathenism has supervened here, for I’ve never seen

a church so ill-kept, in spite of the army of clerics a stone's throw away at Bledburn!"

Having finished our inspection of the west end, we had now arrived at the north door. It stood partly ajar, thanks to the difficulty of either shutting it or opening it further, for the paving was all heaving in mouldering heaps, like the turf in Gray's Elegy, and could hardly be seen for rank weeds, even inside the threshold. The hinges of the door were rusted up, and the top was fast in the loving embrace of a thick root of accursed ivy, which was performing its usual damnable double function of "beautifying" and destroying the whole of the north wall.

"I—I don't reckon to be imaginative, Gregs," said Alan almost in a whisper, "but somehow the whole place seems to reek of decay and evil putrefaction. Ugh!—a toad! I never could stand those horrid things since one fell on me when I was exploring a Roman well in Germany."

The toad blinked, opened its hideous mouth in a bored yawn, and waddled obligingly out of our way, as we crossed the threshold and nearly fell into the church down two steps covered with slimy moss. For a moment, my amazement that a fane in Christian England should be so neglected and desolate, was overshadowed by naturalistic instincts.

"Good Lord!" I said, "fancy finding *Agaricus campestris* on a church floor!"

"What is that, when it's at home?" inquired Alan absently, his eyes glued on a fine piece of detail-carving opposite the door.

"It is the common or field mushroom," I enlightened him. The church was certainly in use:

as evidence there were the candlesticks and (very dirty) altar-cloths in the chancel, an open bible on the lectern, and the other usual fittings ; but despite that, there was in this house of worship a peculiar atmosphere I have never felt in any other church. I cannot define it less vaguely than as a feeling of being uncomfortable, and the consciousness, equally vague, of a brooding, eerie presence.

I felt it strongly, no doubt, through being as a rule so thoroughly happy and at home in the churches of our forefathers. I am sure my companion experienced the same sensation, for, though he made no comment, his eyes met mine and he gave a short, nervous cough, which I know from long experience indicates that all is not serene in his mind.

For some ten minutes, the interior arcade of the *triforium* gallery engrossed our attention, but we failed to find the steps leading up to it, and as the light in the place was not too good, I suggested that we should get along and examine some of the other features while it was yet possible.

"Right you are, Gregs. Then I suggest we begin by investigating that little wooden door in the south wall of the far aisle," Alan decided. He went on to hazard a guess that it ought, by its position, to lead into the mansion on the site of the priory, "though I doubt if we shall get anywhere," he added glumly. "You rarely can in these places."

To tell the truth, that door had been exercising my curiosity ever since I set eyes on it a few minutes before, and I had noticed my friend's glance stray to it several times. Somehow, it seemed to beckon us.

Luckily (as we then thought) the door was un-

locked ; so, passing through it and ascending a circular stone newel staircase, we found ourselves in a long gallery running the whole length of the church south aisle up to the transept, and from the windows we could see that here the domestic buildings also turned south, parallel to the transept ; then continued to form a complete quadrangle, and were thus exactly on the site of the ancient cloisters south of the church. Evidently, then, the little newel-stair up which we had gained access was the original night-stair of the cloisters at their western end, from the monastic dormitories.

The floor of the gallery showed a bare white central strip, indicating that a carpeting had been quite recently taken up from it, and Alan soon found further evidence that the house had been fairly recently inhabited. It was a damp-stained notice which he picked up from the floor, announcing that Messrs. Hammer and Hammer would sell by auction "That very desirable residence known as Merringby Priory" on Friday the 28th day of May, on a date over two years previous to our intrusion upon its desolation. Evidently nobody had found it sufficiently "desirable" to live there.

"Judging by the way the Georgian builders followed the original plan of the priory," I reflected as I gazed on the pathetic mass of rank garden in the centre of the quadrangle, representing the ancient cloister garth, "we ought to find some traces of the medieval work."

"Yes, if the ivy didn't make it so damned dark," growled Alan, with justice, for the ivy, now rattling in a rising evening breeze, nearly obscured the windows, letting only a dim religious light into the

gallery, and beat an eerie tattoo on the panes. It was only when we got to the far south-west corner, in fact, that we could properly see what we were doing, thanks to the declining sun coming through a large and pleasant casement there.

Here we turned to the left, and looked along a similar passage, the one on the far south side and thus parallel to the church ; but we were destined not to explore it, for in the angle, we found to our joy another ancient circular stone staircase, leading down into the gloom of the nether regions.

“Down we go!” said Alan gaily, “this at any rate is a relic of the vanished monastery or nunnery—whichever it was.”

So round and round, down and down, we went, in that dizzying and interminable way these stairs have, making facetious comments on the problem of getting any modern furniture into the upper storey.

It seemed to me that we had descended far more than was warranted by the view from the upper windows, but I must have been wrong, for it was on the ground floor that we did at last emerge, to find it liberally covered with decaying limestone, plaster, filth and cobwebs. “Ugh! This place reeks of fungus-mould, Gregs. What a damp hole to live in. I think I’ll get a pipe going now we’re clear of the church. Got any matches, old man? I used my last on the road.”

I had, in fact, two boxes—we are both heavy on matches—and lit up my own pipe at the same time after handing over one box to Alan.

An idea suddenly struck me—I suppose by the subconscious association between striking a match

and hunting for something.

"I say, Alan, as these steps are preserved above-ground, which is must unusual, surely we should find some traces of the Norman crypt, or undercroft, below ground?"

"Yes," he agreed readily, "and we will probably find its entrance in the erstwhile kitchen premises, as these country-gentry blighters usually desecrated cloister undercrofts by using them as wine-cellars. Otherwise, they would probably have razed the whole place to build their tasteless mansions."

I made no comment, this being one of Granville's *bêtes-noires*; he does forget, when he gets on this subject, that the monks and nuns of old were not to be despised for *their* wine-store, and that they too, had a habit of keeping it in the nice cool crypt! So I followed in silence along the ground-floor passage.

We had not far to seek. Through a half-open door we saw the pump-handle of a kitchen well, and a sink of moderately antique mould, which had probably figured in Messrs. Hammer & Hammer's seductive sale catalogue as "every modern convenience."

"This, my dear Watson," said Alan with a facetiousness which I strongly suspected was forced to cover up a state of mental depression as acute as my own in this mournful decay of a noble home, "is the kitchen."

It was, and on the far side of it an ample oak portal invited attention. It looked as though it had better acquaintance with the stone steps than the inane Georgian windows. We crossed over and tugged it open with difficulty, for the paralysis of age and neglect had affected the door like the rest

of the premises.

Dimly we saw, leading straight down, a flight of stone steps up which there came, on the opening of the door, a most putrid draught to assail our nostrils ; it was worse than the usual church mossiness ; it was of the earth, earthy, the exhalation of the charnel-house.

Again came that nervous cough from Alan.

"Er—I don't envy the butler, if this is where they did keep their wine," he whispered.

Clank, clank, down those damp and slimy steps we went—a dozen, I am almost sure there were—and at the bottom we were confronted by another door, opening inwards this time.

This was the outsize of all ; a truly monastic door, this, made, it seemed, of as many tons of English oak as the carpenters could get together in one piece, and well peppered with a cartload of square nails and iron scroll-work.

Over four feet wide, and some four inches thick, as we could see by the light percolating down from the kitchen, this noble portal needed all our strength jointly to push it open ; which done, we were greeted with a fresh waft of that appalling atmosphere of decaying mortality. Its unpleasantness, however, was much mitigated by the view we got, dimly through the gloom, of a fine crypt-full of heavy Norman piers, apparently in a perfect state of preservation.

"This herculean entrance wants propping open," said Alan stopping its homeward swing with his foot and casting an eye round for a suitable doorstopper.

"Ha! I can spot a bit of loose carving over there

Bring it across, there's a good fellow."

I tried to lift the mass he indicated, which at a cursory glance looked like part of a fallen pier-capital.

"Can't," I gasped, "it'll take both of us."

He came across to me, letting go the door, and between us we staggered with the heavy mass of derelict carving till we got it in position and managed to prop the door firmly open with it.

"That gives a little light anyway, but we still want matches to see that vaulting properly," remarked Alan. "You gave me some, didn't you?"

"Yes, on the top stairs—if you haven't used them all on that foul pipe of yours," I retorted.

He groped in his pocket for the box, cut his fingers on some of the flint-chippings with which he was loaded, and cursed mildly.

Finding the box, he strolled off to about the centre of the crypt, the end of which could be dimly seen about forty feet away from where I stood. Alan struck a match which, after giving fitful illumination to reeking, slimy walls, went out.

"Confound this draught," he growled. Another match was sacrificed, but went the same way. Meantime I too had struck one, but that also expired, leaving us in the semi-darkness.

"I say, old man," called Alan, his voice strangely sepulchral in the dank silence down here under the earth, "I don't know what you think, but it's my belief there are some bad gases down here, because a light would never—what the devil's that?" he broke off sharply.

I heard a slight rattle, as of a matchbox being dropped on the floor, and at that moment my own

box was sent flying by a vicious blow I got across the wrist.

"Bats!" I tried to tell myself, but a cold numbness ran down my arm—and no bat gives one a punch like a prize-fighter.

"B-b-bats!!" I screamed in a frenzy.

No sooner was the word out, than there came from behind me a deep rumbling.

The great door crashed thunderously into place with a violent bang.

I dared not turn round. Some awful magnetism kept me rooted as I stood, with my eyes glued to the far wall.

I could see nothing ; but I could feel a Thing like a loathsome octopus-tentacle round my neck holding me there, forcing me to gaze on what I had no wish to see.

I felt it coming : a flabby mass of warm, stinking flesh, covered with wet hairs, slithered across my face.

By a supreme effort of will, I managed to move one foot. I knew that if I did not, I should die. And as I moved it there came a sickening squelch beneath it, with a mad, gibbering, teetering sound like some half-human creature being trodden upon. A fetid odour wrapped round my mouth.

Then :

"Good God! Gregory ? Where are you? Look!"

Alan was speaking in a hoarse whisper that sounded like a hollow voice from the tomb and far off—though I learnt afterwards that the poor fellow was lying only two feet from me and equally unable to move. He had felt the crawling Thing squelch over him, then fainted.

I looked. I had to do so. I stared before me in the pitch-blackness. For the life of me, I could neither shut my eyes nor turn them away.

Again, heralded by the fetid odour, came that near sense of something foul and menacing.

In the deadly stillness there came also a low rustling sound that was certainly not the scurry of rats or the stirring wings of a bat.

The rustling, as of curtains moved by a fitful breeze, grew more intense, and then came a point of bluish luminosity at the far end of the crypt.

The light grew and grew, and it was this that had attracted Alan's attention just as he was coming to his senses again. It flickered like a Will o' the Wisp in marsh-land, became a nebulous pillar of smoky blue phosphorescence, and finally, by gradual stages that added to the horror of the thing, assumed a distorted human shape.

Meantime a low moaning issued from the region of the weird illumination.

Wildly through my head passed a review of jumbled theories I had read, of auras, evil elementals, emanations. Clearer and clearer became the unknown travesty of a human form at the end of the crypt.

"If that comes any nearer it'll kill me!", Alan shrieked, his voice penetrating the drumming in my ears. "God! *It's coming out of the wall!* Stop it! Keep it off!"

I vaguely remember hearing him fall back with a thud and a choking cry, and again the terrible silence supervened.

The Thing in the wall, however, did not move. Now distinct and framed against the stonework,

which it illuminated for some feet around, I could see it now as the form of a nun, which seemed to bear a heavy weight round which its left arm was crooked.

Then a sound as of a gentle sigh that spoke volumes of misery floated round the echoing pillars, and abruptly the form vanished.

It happened so suddenly that I think the shock and reaction gave me the use of my limbs again. I let out one wild yell that must have been heard in the church itself if there were anyone there. Turning round at last, I wrenched open the great door by summoning every ounce of strength I had left, and fled frantically up the steps to collapse on the floor of the kitchen, crashing my head against the dusty sink.

I suppose not more than five minutes really elapsed before I came round, to pull myself together and recall with horror that I had left Alan down there.

Frankly I confess to my cowardice. Back I went, in fear and trembling, scarcely daring to hope that he was still alive, and groped round for him, for I simply could not bring myself to look for my matchbox. The memory of that unseen hand and the foul tentacle was still too near.

Poor Alan was still unconscious when I nearly fell over his body beside a pillar. I picked him up and carried him up the steps, and was thankful to see him soon come round when his head rested against the cool wall.

He had fallen on his back in the crypt, but across his face was a bar of *thick green slime* like the track of a monstrous snail.

Hastily I rubbed it off with my handkerchief, lest

it should revive the memory of the horror for him—and I quickly threw away the cambric, for it reeked of putrescent flesh.

I had just got his face clean when he opened his eyes and spoke dazedly.

“What happened? Matches gone . . . knocked out of my hand . . . blue thing came for me.”

“You’re all right, old fellow,” I assured him with as steady a voice as I could manage, “you only tripped and fell over something.”

While he was recovering his senses, I descended the steps once more, for the last time. Even to this day I dare not go again into that crypt; and looking back, I wonder how I then forced myself to make that second journey.

I went, however, with a purpose: to fasten the great oak door and keep within whatever things of the tomb it guards, and to see how its ponderous mass could possibly have become shut, seeing that it took two of us to stagger across with the broken carving we used to prop it open.

Fearfully I mustered all my shaken courage to peep inside once again; and there I saw the carved chunk of stone, just visible in the rays down the steps, but at least six feet away from where we had placed it. Certain it is that no human agency could have moved it there, and slammed the portal with such malevolent will.

Quietly I refastened that gateway of secrets, and returned to find Alan now sitting up, but still somewhat dazed. I took his arm, and managed somehow to climb with him the winding stair and regain the one that led down into the church from the house-gallery.

That journey of a few dozen yards was the longest I ever remember. It was almost dark when at last we emerged into the church, and we hurried across its weed-ravaged floor without daring to look at anything save the blessed sky outside.

I tried, but for the life of me I could not make the sign of the cross in that church. Why? They say the masons of the Middle Ages made those hideous gargoyles we see on every church to keep away evil spirits. Here, however, a sympathetic magic had taken the reins, and the spirit of the gargoyles seemed to brood, enjoying for once a rare and hard-earned triumph over the spells of the Church.

Once outside, there came the feeling of safety and freedom once more, and we sank on the grass with our backs to the tower to recuperate. After a few minutes' silence, Alan said he felt better now, and suggested we make a move, as the wind was getting a little chilly.

Still shaking about the legs, we reached our cycles, but just then we could not muster strength to ride them down the drive. Pushing the machines, we must have looked a sorry couple, for the old gardener, who was just packing up his tools for the night as we reached the lodge gate, looked curiously at us and explained:

"Why, surs, 'ee do look queer! Be youm took bad?"

Briefly and, I fear, jerkily, I outlined the ghastly nightmare we had just experienced. The effect on the old rustic was surprising. He dropped his fork and hoe, and turned the colour of putty under his healthy tan.

"God ha' mercy on us. Ye've seen the Nun!",

he muttered.

"What nun?", I gasped.

"Whoi, dawn't ee know? That be one of they convent plaaces, where the nuns lived afore Old Harry's toime, as Oi've 'eerd Parson say. There weren't no men among 'em—which bain't nacheral—an' one o' they nuns wur walled-up aloive in that theer very crypt for 'aving of a child, in thirteen 'undred an thirty fower. They put in the mite with 'er, an' 'twas on an August twenty-eight, which be this very daay as Oi do declare! 'Tis all writ in the records, an' they do saay the Nun appears on this daay every year—though Oi've never seen 'er meself."

"Oi never did 'old wi they nunnery plaaces, Sur," he added reflectively, touching his cap in farewell and hobbling away down the drive.

A FORGOTTEN ITALIAN

“Can I come in ?” inquired a known and well-loved voice one chilly winter afternoon as its possessor, the owner of a humorous old mouth decorated by an outsize in curved pipes, and surmounted by a most episcopal beak of a nose, peered round the door of the already smoke-laden study in the old manor-house occupied by Alan Granville and myself.

The suppliant was our dear old Dominican friend, Father Manson, for whom there is always a chair—provided he cares to shoot its burden of books to the floor.

We both put down our work and rose to greet the priest, whom we had not seen for some weeks, and I rang for the Apostles (our henchmen), of whom James put in an appearance and was carefully impressed with the necessity of producing some of the Father’s favourite muffins for tea.

“You look puzzled, Father,” remarked Alan, “anything worrying you ?”

“No, no, not worrying exactly, but very, very puzzling.” He settled by the fire, produced his pouch, and suddenly shot out the question :

“Do you know anything about a man called Giovanni-Paolo Marana, and do you know if he wrote a book called *The Turkish Spy* ?”

Neither Alan nor I have much use for the niceties of bibliography outside our own historical studies, and we were floored. The only information even my colleague could give was a negative sort.

"Er—no," he said slowly, "I have never heard of *him*, but as it happens, I did once accidentally come across a reference to a book about a Turkish spy, while hunting for something quite different ; but that one was written by a Frenchman named J. du Fresne de Francheville about 1740. If I remember rightly, it had to do with the alleged adventures of a supposed spy at the court of Frankfurt, and was later denounced as a bit of not-very-clever fiction."

"Why do you want to know, Father ?" I asked, after giving Alan time to see if he could recall any more about it.

"Because, Gregory," said the Dominican solemnly, "a very peculiar experience has just befallen me. As you confided to me your Toulouse affair of the 'unholy relics' some time ago, I'd like to tell you about it—that is, if I am not interrupting the work in hand too much ?"

"Not at all, Father!" I exclaimed, "you know that you above all people are always welcome here—as for the litter, have you ever seen this den clear of it ? Well, here comes James with the tea, so tell us over your favourite muffins."

"Well," he began, gazing reflectively into the fire as James did the honours with the tea, "as you know, we priests set our faces resolutely against any of the blasphemous rubbish with which money-making charlatans deceive the public under the name of spiritualism. That attitude, as you realise, is not incompatible with the Church's teachings, but this time an experience has come my way which has caused me to think deeply, especially as there is absolutely no suggestion of charlatanism in the matter—indeed, the very reverse."

"You mean that no attempt is made to profit, by the person concerned?" asked Alan.

"Exactly," the Dominican agreed. "Last week, I had to go to Northampton for a private conference on matters connected with Church organisation in the Midlands, and as I was delayed half a day by having to attend a dying parishioner of my own, I found that the Priory, where I generally stay, was full up.

"However, I met an old colleague from Nottingham Cathedral, with whom I had attended the same seminary as a youth, and he persuaded me to go along with him to some excellent 'digs.' to which he had been recommended, not far from the place of conference.

"This shelter was the home of a Mrs. Shelley, a moderately well-educated woman who through adverse circumstances—her husband was a good but poorly-paid craftsman, and left practically nothing when he died—has been compelled to augment her income by letting apartments, chiefly to theatrical people. She isn't at all the usual landlady type of woman, and over supper we found it quite a pleasure to talk to her. I may say that, although a staunch Anglican, she was not averse either from taking us in or from having a friendly discussion on theological problems. Then after supper, the two principals from one of the local theatres came in, and we found them most pleasant folk, in spite of their rather bohemian and unorthodox attitude to life.

"The next day was a Friday, I remember. After tea Mrs. Shelley, my colleague, and myself sat talking over the fire, when I happened for the first time

to glance up at the pictures which hung round this particular room, and, with my interest in art, I at once noticed something rather peculiar about them—especially one, a little piece in oils on a wooden panel, which looked, at that distance, to be a sixteenth or early seventeenth century painting of a man in a scholar's black robe, with a flat cap on his head, and holding under his arm a book covered in red plush or leather, stamped G.P.M.

“‘Excuse my being rude, Mrs. Shelley,’ I observed, ‘but you have some rather strange old pictures up there. Are you a collector?’”

“‘Ah, no,’ she smiled, ‘but as you have mentioned them I suppose I must tell you about them. *I painted those pictures.*’”

“I was astounded, and remarked that she must be a very fine artist, and one of very mixed styles, for some of the pictures looked almost post-impressionist, while that of the scholar was absolutely in the manner of a Renaissance old master.

“‘Wrong again, Father!’” said Mrs. Shelley, settling herself comfortably with some knitting. She went on :

“‘Now, you two gentlemen are priests ; I know well the view the Catholic clergy take of spirit matters, and you may stop your ears at what I'm going to tell you.

“‘Normally, I can't even draw a straight line, let alone mix colours or paint a picture ; but with the passing of years—I am now 54 and don't mind admitting it—I have experienced a strange power, a growing ability, to do this, under some influence that I at any rate cannot explain.

“‘Let me say at once that I am *not* a spiritualist,

in the ordinary sense. Indeed, after going one night, much against my inclinations, to a public meeting of these people, I have been utterly disgusted with their ways.

“ ‘Even as a little girl, though, I had some psychic gifts ; but what I saw was so pooh-poohed by my strict church-going parents that in the end I ceased, as a sensitive child will, to confide in them, and kept it to myself. For instance, going up to bed one night, I distinctly saw a coffin in the doorway of one bedroom I passed on the way to my top landing; and in that room my brother died suddenly a fortnight later.

“ ‘Well, some time after I had married and come to this present house, a woman I knew persuaded me, more as a joke than anything, to go and see an old fortune-teller in the town who was reputed to be rather good.

“ ‘I went regarding the whole thing as nonsense, but as soon as the old dame set eyes on me, she said intently that if I took up a pencil, it would ‘write by itself,’ but that I must do this in a spirit of reverence.

“ ‘Frankly, I thought this just piffle—in fact, I thought no more about it ; but some months later, going into the drawing-room to water the plants, I saw on the table a pencil and paper, both of a kind which, I knew, belonged to no-one in the house ; and we had had no visitors for a long time. While I was standing wondering how they got there—for I’m a very tidy person—the old seer’s words came back to me.

“ ‘Still treating the matter jokingly, I thought : I wonder if the thing *will* do automatic writing ? So I took up the pencil lightly, without putting any

pressure on it, and let it move of its own accord over the paper. The result was a picture of the most weird trees and animals, like nothing on earth. I found out long afterwards, when my gifts had developed and I started investigating the things I had drawn, that they depicted plants and creatures long-extinct.

“After this, on several occasions when suddenly impelled to take up a pencil, I got messages ; one foretold accurately that my mother would die on a certain date.

“I now began to treat the matter seriously, and ultimately something told me to buy brushes and oil-paints, of all things! I did. For some months they remained untouched.

“Then one night, I had a peculiar dream, and it was repeated for several nights afterwards. I dreamed I saw a dignified, hawk-faced man in a black robe, with a flat cap on his head, walking slowly down a huge flight of palace steps in Renaissance Italy, carrying under his arm a book bound in red, with the initials G.P.M. stamped on it in gold letters. Then the scene changed abruptly and I saw the same man in what looked like an oriental palace, dressed in baggy Arabian Nights costume. All the time he was muttering to himself in Italian—which language I don’t know—but somehow I seemed to know that the words meant ‘Turkish spy’.

“Naturally I couldn’t make head or tail of it, but a few evenings later I fell into a queer, half-trance sort of mood, and without consciously realising what I was doing, I got out the brushes, oil-paints, and a smoothed panel of wood that was lying about. It was rather laughable, really, for my dear husband

next morning was looking all over the place for it. You see, he was an engraver, and he'd got this plaque ready for some client's name-plate. I laugh now sometimes when I think of the look on his face when I had to explain what had happened to it!

“ ‘Anyhow, I, who had never in my life touched oils, and knew not the first thing about the mystery of their technique, found myself painting the picture you now see up there.

“ For weeks afterwards I questioned friends and acquaintances more educated in literary matters than myself, as to whether they had ever heard of a man with initials G.P.M., connected with a book about a Turkish spy. None of them had, but a cousin finally made the sensible suggestion that, as she had promised me a day in London with her, we should take it, and go to the British Museum reading-room. ‘If that book exists, dear’, she said, ‘you can bet they’ve got it catalogued there.’ She was the only person, apart from my husband, to whom I had revealed the real reason for wanting to know.

“ ‘Well, to the British Museum we went, feeling very nervous in that deadly atmosphere of brainy silence, with irritable old scholars glaring up as we walked down to the great central circular desk of the reading-room. The official who came forward, however, was courtesy itself, and soon had his nose in their colossal catalogues.

“ ‘He ultimately came back with the information that the Museum library actually does possess a book called *The Turkish Spy*, written and published in the seventeenth century by a man named Giovanni Paolo Marana, otherwise known, in the French edition, as Jean-Paul Marana. He added that it was

a very rare work, of which few copies are known.

"Well, there is the story of my panel. How on earth was I, a middle-class town housewife, who cannot even read French or Italian, and have no knowledge of out-of-the-way literature, to know that such a work had been written by a man of that name—the man of the initials in my picture? I can't explain it. I don't attempt to. All I can say is that I regard the gift of the brush as one sent from God."

"So, you see," concluded Father Manson, "that's why I wondered if you, a couple of historians of wide knowledge, had run across this obscure work. I have verified Mrs. Shelley's statements at the British Museum, by the way.

"Somehow, you know," he added, "I can't think that even the Church would say this woman was possessed of an evil spirit. You see, another of her pictures is a striking pastel of Our Lady, signed with the name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and five art experts whom I have taken to see it swear both picture and signature are genuinely his work. Have you any more muffins left, Gregory?"

FATAL OAK

“Why the devil didn’t you buy a *car* while you were about it, Alan?” I exclaimed with some asperity to my friend and co-historian Alan Granville, as the ominous noise from our vehicle’s intestinal regions grew worse and worse.

It was getting on for 9.30 at night, and here we were, lost in those desolate lanes that cross the flats of Buckinghamshire east of Aylesbury, having taken a wrong turning in trying to get back to Buckingham, our temporary headquarters. We had come down to Bucks. in connection with research for the subject of our next joint volume of historical studies, on the Saxon kingdoms, to see if we could gain any light on that much-disputed question, the site of the famous battle of Bedcanford, which was almost certainly in this region, and *not* at Bedford.

Our thoughts at the moment, however, were very much in the present. The car was getting steadily worse.

“Brr-rr-pup-pup-brr-brr-pup-pup” it went—a sure sign that a ‘big-end’ was giving up the ghost.

Alan ignored my sarcasm, only remarking: “I think we shall just make that village over there—it can’t be far from Aylesbury, surely.

“Half a minute,” I said, “there’s a signpost. I’ll get out and see what it says, but for goodness sake keep the engine running if you can!”

Both feats were accomplished successfully, and as

the result we found ourselves heading cautiously for a place announced to be Bierton. Here, most obligingly right outside the door of a friendly-looking public house, our car gave a final chorus of brr-pup-pup-pup and was silent. It refused to budge another foot.

I had noticed that we had crawled up an extraordinarily long village street before this final indignity, and that by the looks of the cottages, we should have some difficulty in getting put up anywhere for the night. The inn seemed the likeliest place, and as the car had so considerately deposited us right on its doorstep, in we went and ordered double whiskies, for it was a bitterly cold night, and a nasty drizzle had begun to fall.

As one does, we got chatting with the landlord, who soon heard about our trouble—the genius of country innkeepers for unobtrusive pumping is amazing. He however, had no accommodation available.

Standing beside us at the bar was a tall man with a cultured, ascetic face, but a bitter mouth drawn down at the corners. This individual, who merely waved silently at the landlord to refill his glass, now addressed us, in a very refined voice.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” he said, “can I help you? We’re only three miles from Aylesbury, but it is a godforsaken hole even at 10 p.m. and I doubt if you would get a garage there on the phone now, for a tow-in. I don’t know anywhere in the village you could put up—except my place, if you care to accept a shake-down.”

We thanked him profusely, and exchanged cards.

His simply read :

*Montague Reval
Bierton,
Aylesbury.*

Mr. Reval excused himself for a moment, to see about getting the tow-rope out of his own car, which was parked in the inn yard, and I turned to the landlord.

"I say," I inquired, "that's Reval the great collector and authority on antiques, isn't it?"

"Aye, sir, that's him, an' a rare good genelman too. He's given me a good price for several o' my bits, an' he comes in most evenings just for a quiet drink and chat—knows everybody in the place, as you might say and keepin' his ears open, no doubt, to hear of more old stuff.

"You're lucky, genelman, to be seein' his place. He came down here a couple of years ago, got for a song a lovely old couple o'Tudor cottages on what we call Broughton lane, an' restored 'em—and a rare job he's made of it, too, from what I hear."

By this time our rescuer had returned, just in time to hear mine host chant his "Time—genelman—please!" (first warning). Mr. Reval cheerfully joined us in a last drink, and we were able to express pleasure at so unexpectedly meeting a connoisseur whose name was known in every auction-room of Europe. He returned the compliment with some nice remarks about our historical works, which, I must say, he had read pretty thoroughly.

"Time-genelman-*please!*" was now chanted inexorably for the last time, so we trooped out into the drizzle, to find that Reval had already got his car round and hitched ours up to it.

"You're right," he said, "there's a big-end gone ; you can't do a thing about it till morning. However, my garage will hold both cars."

So the undignified procession set off, with Alan steering our car in the rear. We seemed to go back down that interminable village street, then sharp to the right, and kept bearing right round the back of the place, finally coming to rest outside a noble half-timbered structure in a narrow, winding lane.

The cars were soon run into the garage, a huge building, evidently an ancient barn, beside the erstwhile cottages, and we entered the house, to step right back into the time of the Armada.

I never have seen in any one house so marvellous a collection of Tudor, Elizabethan, and Jacobean furniture, or one so perfectly arranged. Our host led the way into a dining-room that went back even further, for it had a priceless monastery refectory table, and into this room, as he was producing a welcome decanter, there walked a woman of about thirty, at least ten years younger than Reval. She might have stepped straight out of a Burne-Jones canvas ; flaming red hair done up in a towering mass surmounted a deadly-pale face, and she wore a medieval-looking gown of heavy, sombre green brocaded material.

"My wife," said Reval, giving her a queer, old-fashioned bow as he presented us and explained our breakdown.

Mrs. Reval inclined her head almost indifferently, and merely continued what had evidently been her original progress through the room to a door on the far side. She uttered none of the conventional banalities whatever. All she said was, in an accent

definitely foreign, but which I could not place : "Yes ? Please to excuse me. I go to bed"—and disappeared through the curtain.

Queer hostess, I thought, but we were soon too busy examining the exquisite antique treasures of the room to give the woman a second thought.

Reval did the honours of his collection with the deep knowledge and charm one finds in the true connoisseur. Finally he remarked.:

"That corner looks a bit unbalanced. It has just lost a chair, which I gave this morning to a friend and fellow-collector. It was a queer piece and not very beautiful, being a bit of that imitation, chancel-chair style of Gothic they turned out about 1830 ; but it had a curious history, if you'd like to hear it."

"Well," our host went on, when we were comfortably settled by the fire with our glasses, "that chair was actually made out of a gibbet-post. In the year 1773, a small farmer of Bierton named Richard Holt was murdered in his bed the night after his daughter had died. Earlier in the evening, a ratcatcher and chimney-sweep of Tring—just across in Herts—named Edward Corbet, had come along intent on robbing the house ; but, seeing the farmer praying at the bedside of his dead daughter, he lay low till the man had retired, then got in down the wide chimney with the aid of a ladder from the farmyard, and slew him.

"Unfortunately for him, Corbet accidentally shut his dog in the house when decamping with the booty ; the milk-boy and neighbours forced the door next morning, on getting no reply, and the first thing they saw was Corbet's dog. This of course led to his arrest—some of Holt's property

was found on him. He was duly tried and hanged at Aylesbury, and his body was hung in chains from a post in a field ever since called Corbet's Piece, between here and the hamlet of Hulcott. Oral tradition in the village, handed down from father to son, says his skull was still in the rusted irons in 1795.

“A few years later, the post was taken down, and part of it served for years as a farm gate-post. The rest was taken away by a chair-maker and turned into a chair and small fancy “memento” articles—but I have never seen any of those.

“Naturally, as a collector, I prowl the district for antiques, and know pretty well every cottager and farmer for miles round, to say nothing of the parsons ; for they, being called to cottage bedsides, get more chance than any collector, let alone a dealer, of seeing the good old stuff. Well, only a week or so ago, I dropped along to see an old acquaintance, one of the retired cottagers, who has often (for a commission, of course) put me on to a good article he has spotted around the houses of his cronies—he’s a great old gossip and quite a character hereabouts.

“On this particular morning, I could see the old boy was agog with excitement, and he piloted me without ceremony into his kitchen, where, behold, was the hideous example of a churchwarden-gothic chair.

“‘Look-ee, Mister Reval’ ” he said, “‘ now what do ee think o’ that for a fine piece—’tis the very chair made from the gibbet on Corbet’s Piece a ’undred years agone.’ ”

‘Naturally, I got out of him the story I have just

told you, and asked how on earth he had picked it up. The explanation was curious. He said his son had insisted, during the previous week-end, on at last having a long-threatened turnout of the stable-loft —they have an old one-horse stable beside the cottage—with the result that this chair had come to light.

“My old man (his name, by the way, is Jim *Holt* Wilson) is, by a weird coincidence, a descendant of the murdered man, and that appears to be how his great-grandfather got hold of the chair from its maker. The old chap had clean forgotten its existence till this turnout and then, with the countryman’s usual ideas on anything that *looks* a bit antique, he thought it might interest me. Heaven knows how long it had been in that loft, for it was covered with grime, but—”

Here Mr. Reval paused, and finished in what I thought was a curiously strained voice :

“Its story did interest me—very much. So I bought it. My—my friend and rival collector, who lives a quarter of a mile away, makes a speciality of collecting things with a queer history. He put me on to this refectory table when I first came here two years ago, so I gave him the chair—to repay a debt, as it were. He’s half Portuguese—John Ribeiro is his name—and I rather suspect he has inherited a taste for weird things from that side ; I understand that Portugal to this day is riddled with witchcraft and superstition.”

“Yes,” Alan confirmed with a laugh, “I remember a Portuguese scholar I knew at Oxford, who tried to kill one of the dons by magic with the aid of an extraordinary thing he called a witch’s moon-dial.

In everything else he was a most enlightened man, but he really was the embodiment of superstition run riot."

"I too," I was able to add to the discussion, "know a Portuguese-Indian of the same stamp ; he swore that the village witch-doctor had blasted a house in his native Goa a century ago, and that the curse worked itself out even to-day. A charming race, but with the most incredible ideas, the Portuguese. This friend of mine, for instance—"

I got no further. These was a sudden violent hammering at the front door, and with hardly a pause after it, Reval's manservant burst into the room without knocking.

"Excuse me, sir," he gasped, "it's Mr. Ribeery's man—he says can you come at onst—something terrible's happened at his place."

Granville and I jumped to our feet at once, but, to our surprise, Reval heaved himself out of his chair in a leisurely manner as if the agitated servant had merely announced that the gas-man had called.

"I think," he said, without a trace of excitement or emotion, "that we had better go along and see what is the matter. You will come with me, gentlemen ?"

We at once assented, and exchanged raised eyebrows behind his back, for in his manner we scented something very strange indeed. If this was his friend in trouble, why the icy calmness ?

Out in the hall, we found Senhor Ribeiro's English valet in a state of collapse, he could only mutter " 'Orrible, 'orrible! Come, sir—come quick for Gawd's sake!"

I patted the man on the shoulder, for he was very

near hysteria, and within a few moments we had all piled into Reval's car in the downpour, and were heading on down the Broughton lane. It only seemed a stone's throw before we halted at another old house, from the open door of which streamed a hall-light.

Alan and I threw ourselves out of the car and rushed up the drive, with the manservant panting after us. Glancing hurriedly round, I saw that Reval was strolling leisurely behind, actually stopping to light a cigarette, and resuming with his hands in his pockets ; but not until later did we recall his amazing behaviour, forgetting it in the rush of the moment.

"Where ? What's happened ?" I snapped to the servitor, "come on, man, pull yourself together!"

"In th-th-there, sir!" he gibbered, pointing to an open door at the end of the hall on the right.

We flung ourselves into the room—and stopped short, for such a sight met my eyes as I hope I never may see again.

In a massive pseudo-gothic chair against the wall of the room sat all that was left of Mrs. Reval. The striking pre-Raphaelite hair was all scorched to a horrible tuft right on the crown of the head, the rest of which was bald, blackened skull. The face was a hideous charred and seared mass, from which grinned two rows of teeth from which the lips had utterly gone ; and the once-statuesque body was a thing of shrivelled skin on which the Renaissance gown hung grotesquely as from a clothes-peg. It looked as though the woman had been struck by lightning.

On his knees at her feet, clutching frantically at

the gown, sobbing wildly and gibbering in a mixture of English and Portuguese, was an olive-skinned man whom we guessed at once to be Senhor Ribeiro.

The first shock of the spectacle over, we plunged forward, only to be halted by a steely grip on the shoulder. Reval had come up behind, and now detained us with out-thrust arms. In a voice of ice, he remarked :

“I do not think I would touch it, if I were you, gentlemen.”

Something in his tone made us stay rooted there in the middle of the floor.

We whipped round and stared at him, but there was no hint of madness in the connoisseur’s cold eyes.

“But good God, man, can’t you see it’s your wife?” shouted Alan.

The stern, bitter mouth gave a sardonic laugh.

“The tense is slightly inaccurate, gentlemen : It *was* my wife.”

The gibbering wretch grovelling at the brocaded horror in the chair suddenly rose, let out a scream of hysterical rage, and made a flying leap at Reval.

Quickly Alan and I interposed ourselves and gripped him, forced him into a chair. Alan, who speaks fairly good Portuguese, though his French is bad, rapped at the poor wretch in his own tongue :

“Now, come, come, better tell us what happened.”

Reval interposed, a delicate hand waving all to silence.

“There is no need for *that* object to explain. I will! You see, gentlemen, this—er—tragedy is not entirely unexpected by me, though it has perhaps hardly taken the turn I had planned.

"I told you some of the story of the chair, but not all of it. The reason it was left in the cottager's stable-loft was that, according to a manuscript left by his great-grandfather, which he showed me, the earth-bound elemental, which is all that remains of the murderer Corbet, is *still attached to the oak*, and it appears that if an evil person uses that chair, the result is fatal. Death has come thus horribly to—*the adulteress!*"

He pointed dramatically at the thing that had been his wife, and went on inexorably :

"You see, this manuscript states that when the great-grandfather's brother, who had betrayed his friend's wife, sat in it, he was shrivelled as if struck by lightning. Another of the family, who had been sentenced to transportation for homicide but escaped and crept home, sat in it, with the like result.

"They had inquiries made, and discovered that the chairmaker who fashioned that piece was closely related to Corbet. On his death-bed, the old man confessed that he knew the power of the earthbound Thing that lurked in the oaken post, and had made the chair as a present to my cottager's ancestor in revenge for the kinsman's hanging."

"You, you fool!" he blazed, suddenly turning on Ribeiro, who sat moaning with his head between his hands and calling on a large variety of saints, "d'you think I didn't know about my wife's visits to you here? Eh? Under cover of friendship you stole her! I valued her more than any of my treasures—very well, my *friend*. I sent you a present today—Death!"

"Unfortunately—not that it matters, for I ceased to love her when I found she had betrayed me—

my wife—your mistress—sat in the chair first."

Reval turned to us, still calm and apparently utterly, dangerously sane.

"What do you say, gentlemen? Don't you think it would be a good idea if we remove *That* and make *him* occupy the throne of honour?"

"God, man, are you out of your mind?" I shouted, clutching him wildly, while Alan got between us and the chair.

"Look out!" yelled Alan a second later.

The Portuguese had drawn a knife and flung it like lightning at Reval who, with me, as I was still gripping him, ducked hurriedly behind the table.

Reval was now too quick for me. He slipped out of my grasp like an eel, and, in what seemed a simultaneous movement, raised his head above the table, shot out an arm, and grabbed a heavy barrel-shaped tobacco-jar from it, with the evident intention of hurling it at Ribeiro.

Before he could do so, however, he let out a scream of agony. There was a flash that seemed to come from the jar and run right up his arm. There came a ghastly smell of burning flesh, and Reval crumpled across the table, a travesty of a human being, charred to a cinder like his wife.

Ribeiro gibbered wildly for a moment, flung up his arms, and fell on the carpet in a dead faint.

"Quick, Gregory—I saw a phone in the hall as we came in. Get that fool of a servant and get him to put you on to the nearest doctor! We can't save Reval, but we may pull Ribeiro round."

The servant, who had been crouching under the stairs in a half-conscious state of terror, summoned sufficient wits to do what was required, and within

a few seconds, despite the lateness of the hour, I was speaking to a Dr. Mason at the other end of the wire.

He promised to be along immediately, and within five minutes of the call he thundered up the drive in a high-powered car.

“Good God!” he exclaimed. A rapid glance showed him that the Revals were beyond recall, but he set to work at once on the Portuguese and managed to bring him round. We got the poor wretch on to a couch, and Dr. Mason turned his attention to the two charred bodies.

“Extraordinary! How did this happen? Somebody been playing about with electric fuses?” he snapped, “and may I ask who you gentlemen are?”

We explained our identity and presence briefly while the medico was examining the woman’s body.

Bending over that of Reval, he exclaimed suddenly, “What’s this? Hm! Damn funny!” He took from beneath the shrivelled hand the massive oak-brass-bound tobacco-jar, straightened his back, and put the object down again on the table, eying it somewhat gingerly.

“Come and sit down, you fellows, and let’s have a drink before we do anything else,” he said, adding “especially before we send for the police, as we shall have to do. Ribeiro’ll be all right now—chiefly shock.”

We helped ourselves unbidden to drinks from Ribeiro’s decanter. Dr. Mason leaned forward confidentially.

“Now look here,” he said, “I know all these three people well—should say, I *knew* the Revals. Do you care to tell me anything you know about this affair? I think I can cast a bit of light on it.”

We told the amazing story of the evening's events. Here and there Dr. Mason nodded, but he made no interruption. When we had finished, he jerked a thumb over his shoulder towards the tobacco-jar on the table.

"What Reval didn't know," he said, puffing his pipe reflectively, "was that *that jar was also made from the gibbet-oak*. Ribeiro only got it a few days ago. I often used to drop in and have dinner and a game of chess with him, and he showed me the jar for the first time the night before last. He bought it in a junk-shop in Aylesbury, he said ; but I recognised the thing, for I'm a local man, and when I was a boy my grandfather owned it, and told me its story, and that of the chair."

"Knowing how superstitious the Portuguese are, I didn't pass on the yarn to Ribeiro. I wish to God I had done, now. What I don't understand is why the jar didn't, so to speak, 'get' Ribeiro before the chair got his partner in sin. I can understand its getting Reval, with the will to murder in his heart—but the moral values seem all wrong! I'd have thought Reval's anger, being justifiable, less heinous than Ribeiro's calculated treachery, but I suppose we shall never know what degree of sinfulness is required to bring these queer forces into action.

"Well, it's past 1 a.m., and I'm afraid we shall have to drag our fourteen stone Sergeant Bunnett out of bed. Y'know," he finished whimsically, knocking out his pipe as he made for the telephone, "I think this is the sort of case that ought to be put in the hands of some Scottish officer from the Yard, preferably named Inspector MacAbre!"

Author's note : The story of the Bierton murder and gibbet is actually taken from Ms. notes on the history of the district, collected by a former rector of Aston Clinton, a neighbouring village. There does exist in Aylesbury to this day a snuff-box made out of the gruesome relic.—I have seen it. M.P.D.

THE DEMONIAC GOAT

“Well, of all the coincidences!”, exclaimed Alan Granville, suddenly emerging from behind a mountain of tomes and papers, and peering over at me through the thick fog of tobacco smoke hanging over the study.

“What’s that?” I inquired, laying down my pen to refill a foul but trustworthy briar by way of a brief respite from my struggles with the discrepant texts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

“Why,” replied my colleague, “that wretched press-cutting agency to which we made a subscription about a year ago has at last sent us something really useful—which saves us the trouble of wading through the columns of politics and other ignorant rubbish written by reporters.

“The coincidence,” he added, “is that it immediately concerns the matter in hand.”

This, I should explain, was our joint volume of research on the Anglian kingdom of Mercia, a companion volume to the one we wrote on *The Rise and Fall of Wessex* which received so favourable a reception at the hands of the few reviewers who have any knowledge of the subjects dealt with in the books they review.

“Listen to this, Gregs,” Alan went on, holding up the cutting. He proceeded to read :

AMAZING DISCOVERY IN DERBYSHIRE
Cave-Hunting Clergyman
Finds Saxon Coin Hoard

A discovery which bears every promise of being

of great historical importance has just been made by the Rev. Ashley Tudor, M.A., who for some years has been exploring Derbyshire caves.

While examining the floor of a little-known cavern on the hill known as Cademan Tor last week, his attention was attracted by a patch of earth that seemed much looser than the rest of the deposit composing it, and had a kind of hummock. Digging it, he found, only a few inches below the surface, a pot of crude earthenware, typical of Anglo-Saxon cooking-pots, containing a large number of coins.

These on examination proved to be entirely of the Anglian period, and chiefly silver pennies of King Offa of Mercia.

The rev. gentleman, who had at once informed the coroner of the discovery in accordance with the law on Treasure Trove, told our representative in an interview . . .

“We needn’t trouble about what he told the imaginative and obviously half-educated reporter fellow,” Alan broke off. “Let’s see if there is anything else of real information-value.

“Ah, yes,” he proceeded, reading from a patch further down the cutting, “here is something specially in your line, Gregs :—

‘In digging the layer below the stalagmite—and it seems that the cave has hardly been used within historical time—Mr. Tudor found, besides flint implements and human teeth, bones of the red deer, short-horned ox, badger, goat, etc.’

“Yes, that seems to be all of technical interest—there follows a lot of journalese rubbish about Offa of Mercia, mostly wrong, including the dates,

apparently slung together by some hasty sub-editor with the aid of a few popular works of reference, as usual."

"Well," I remarked, "before we go any further with our work, seeing that my own section has just reached the career of Offa, I think we ought to go up to Derbyshire and see these finds, don't you? No doubt the mint-moneyers' names will give us some valuable evidence. It's not every day that an Anglo-Saxon coin-hoard turns up."

Alan agreed that the discovery, coming at this juncture, was most opportune and that we certainly ought, as he jocularly put it, to inspect the body, "preferably before some fool of a coroner impounds the hoard," he added caustically.

So it was that this bright June morning after breakfast found us poring over the maps, for I had to confess complete ignorance as to the whereabouts of this Cademan Tor.

"The Lord alone knows where it is," said Alan. "I never heard of the place till I took up this cutting. The name, however, is definitely Keltic as to the last part, and I shouldn't wonder if the *Cademan* is, not the Old English name it looks on paper, but the Keltic roots—"

"All right, old man," I interrupted. "Suppose we try to find the place first? Anyway, *you* ought to know it, with all the hill-climbing you used to do in the Long Vacs."

It was very ridiculous of me, I know, but somehow I felt slightly irritated that my encyclopædia had let me down—for I have never known a man of so vast a range of knowledge as my collaborator, an accomplishment borne out by his looks, for Alan

Granville resembles a compound-portrait of Dante, Savonarola, and the traditional idea of Sherlock Holmes, with ascetic features and an enormous dome of a head.

I buried my nose again in my Anglo-Saxon texts, Granville meantime nosing about in a dim corner at the top of the bookshelves which stretch, crammed full, from floor to ceiling of our den. Suddenly, he descended the library step-ladder empty-handed, exclaiming,

“Why, hang it, I ought to have remembered, without wasting time looking for the general atlas I *have* heard of Cademan Tor. It’s about two miles from the famous Elden Hole, that queer ravine in Elden Hill, near the road from Buxton to Castleton.”

“Then how do we get there?” I asked, cheered by the rehabilitation of my encyclopædia.

“Ah, *that* I don’t know,” Alan smiled; but the question was soon settled by reference to the A.A. and other maps, which show Elden Hill to be about four miles from Castleton, in the heart of the Peak Forest district, with a little station called Edale, on a branch line, as the nearest railway communication.

“So our Ali Baba’s cave of the coins is still further in the wilderness,” said Alan, “and the question is, where we shall find the reverend explorer?”

“Well,” I suggested, “look him up in *Crockford*; he’s probably one of these country parsons with a nice fat living and nothing to do, somewhere in the district.”

We were considerably astonished to find that the “cave-hunting clergyman,” as the newspaper dubbed him, did not honour the pages of the ponderous

Church of England clerical directory with his name or benefice.

"Funny," I mused, "unless, of course, he isn't really a cleric, but only some dissenting minister—though they don't usually go in for historical research. Try the list of new ordinations since the work was in the press; perhaps he has only just donned the dog-collar."

"You idiot," growled Alan testily, "this cutting says he has been cave-exploring in the district for years. I read it out, didn't I?"

None the less, as I pointed out that the rev. gentleman might have been ordained recently and late in life, he went on industriously hunting through the book in search of the list of new names; but here also he drew blank. In the act of shutting the directory, however, he gave a start of surprise.

"Well, if this doesn't take the biscuit," he exclaimed (for my worthy collaborator has a habit of using slang when surprised at anything). "I just happened to see the obituary page of fresh corpses since the last edition, and behold, it says that the Rev. Ashley Tudor, who retired in 1925 from the living of Snuffleby Parva (which by the way is in south Derbyshire) *died on May 10th last year*. There must be some awful mistake. I've never known *Crockford* make an error like that before."

"The best thing we can do," I opined, "is undoubtedly to take the risk and bank on the allegedly-deceased cleric being alive, and running him to earth at the scene of his labours. Alive he is, all right—why, he gave this reporter fellow an interview—when was it?" (I consulted the date of the cutting) "only three days ago—on Monday.

"As we don't know where to write to him," I added, seeing that *Crockford* gave no address for the deceased, "we had better go up in the car to-morrow. Trains don't seem much use in that wild region."

It was settled, then, and we compiled the route from our Leicestershire Wold manor-house up to Castleton without difficulty. Alan agreed that we had best take the Apostles, our two faithful manservants, with us, as they would be useful if there was any mountain-scrambling to be done, and we thought we might as well seize the opportunity to descend the famous Elden Hole itself.

So James and John were rung for, and merely told to get everything ready for a possible three days' stay in the Derbyshire hill-district. It was quite sufficient for those excellent fellows. We knew that early next morning we should find the luggage-compartment of the car neatly packed with hand-bags, stout boots and leggings, climbing-irons, ropes, and Norfolk suits, cameras, specimen-cases, and archæological "restoring" chemicals—how different from the unnecessary questions and fussing of fool female housekeepers and wives!

I need not waste the reader's time with any rhapsody over the route or the wonderful Derbyshire scenery. Those who have once succumbed to it go there again and again; those who have not seen it have missed a precious possession of this our England.

Suffice it to say that, making an early start and taking our time on the journey, we found ourselves at Castleton in comfortable time to choose a hotel as headquarters, and to have lunch. After the meal, we took the precaution of getting our directions for

reaching Cademan Tor from the landlord, who knew every inch of the district—as innkeepers in that region have to, indeed, owing to the annual stream of visitors for hill-climbing.

He gave us clear instructions as to reaching the hill itself, but about the man we had come to seek he was less certain, even with the aid of the newspaper cutting.

"Hm! Rev. Ashley Tudor? The most I know about him is that he's reputed to live in a sort of old army-hut bungalow of his own up there in the hills," said Mine Host. "I've never seen him, and he's said to be a bit unsociable, except to others that studies what he does—I remember the reporter-chap havin' a bite here and inquirin' for him. The reverend never comes down to the villages—but you'd best do what the reporter did: I sent him along to old Robbins' store for directions, as Robbins delivers the rev.'s groceries each week."

This was a bit of luck, and, armed with the address of Mr. Robbins' general emporium, we lost no time in seeking him out. The old tradesman scratched his head vigorously when asked for directions for reaching our excavator's hill-stronghold, and the best he could suggest was that, as we had a car, and the next day was Friday, the day his van always went up there with supplies, we'd best follow the van from the shop at nine a.m. next day. The reporter chap, he said, had tipped his vanman handsomely to run him up there; but Joe was a good lad an' often stayed overtime, so Mr. Robbins magnanimously didn't mind!

The worthy Joe had evidently been informed, and no doubt saw visions of rolling in wealth from

tips this week, for he was plainly on the look-out for us next morning, and warned us to be prepared suddenly to follow his van off the Elden Hole road on to a bumpy cart-track, which, he hinted, we'd never find without *his* aid. Automatically I made sure I had a couple of half-crowns in readiness, and got behind our wheel.

The previous afternoon and evening we had devoted to touring round a little, picking out the various hills with the aid of the map, so that we knew Cade-man Tor on approaching it now.

Joe duly led us into the wilds and up his villainous cart-road, finally halting his van in front of a big, sprawling bungalow concocted out of a variegated collection of old army-huts and log-cabins built on the Elizabethan E-plan, with a grassy plot between the main block and the two side-wings.

On what appeared to be the front door, out of about half a dozen, fluttered a paper, which the worthy Joe informed us was the rev's shopping list for next week. Joe had never set eyes on the occupant, but "he allus paid 'is bills reg'lar by them cheque things, so nubuddy didn't worry!"

We tipped Joe handsomely and let him depart, then took a look round after knocking without response. It was evident that no-one was at home, and heavy curtains screened every window. On the verandah was piled, in indiscriminate confusion, all the paraphernalia of a cave-exploring antiquary—irons, ropes, spiked boots, a theodolite tripod, and every conceivable sort of excavated object, from mere fossil ammonites to Roman and Bronze Age pottery and flint implements. Evidently his reverence had been having a good bag of late, but was not very

methodical with his finds, unless these were throw-out pieces.

Concluding that our quarry would no doubt be found already at work in his cave, we surveyed with our binoculars the hillside which we now knew to be Cademan Tor ; in the valley between it and the opposite hill, the bungalow stood securely sheltered from view. Finally Alan saw signs of a dark cave-mouth half-way up the slope so, leaving the Apostles in the car for the time being, we struggled up the loose débris to the cave.

We had been lucky in our selection, for as we finally staggered on to a fair ledge in front of its mouth, we heard the vigorous sound of a pickaxe proceeding from the depths, and hallooed, "Anyone there ?"

Instantly the axe was dropped, footsteps approached, and there emerged, blinking in the sunlight, an extraordinary figure. He was well over six feet in height, but bent with the appearance of great age, borne out by a withered, absolutely vulturish face, surmounted by the most weird dome of a head I have ever seen, which in its turn was crowned by a large, wide-spreading biretta such as the high-church Anglican clergy affect. The whole structure looked as though it would part company at any moment from the scraggy neck, which was encircled by an orthodox clerical dog-collar, none too clean. Our parson was coatless, but retained his clerical waistcoat, and his sleeves were rolled up, revealing thin, sinewy arms as long as a gorilla's, and the way he walked, bent and somewhat bow-legged, added to the impression. His eyes belied the rest of his aged appearance. They should, one

felt, have been pale and watery, but as he came out of his cavern they glowed a queer fiery-green, like a cat's ; and I took an instinctive dislike to the man.

“What's this ?” he snapped, “more reporters ?”

We hastened to disillusion him, and presented our credentials, at which his manner underwent an immediate change.

“You see,” he said somewhat apologetically, “that fool of a coroner must have told the newspaper-people about the coins when I reported the find. I hate society and being disturbed—but of course your visit's a different matter, and you are very welcome to examine the hoard. I know your Wessex study, of course—I keep in touch with the scientific world through technical reviews.”

“Better come in and view the site while we're here,” he added, leading the way back into his cave, “the coins are down at my house.”

We followed our sinister-looking guide through a maze of passages, some of which, he held, were natural, with enlargements made artificially ; and as we went, we noticed an extraordinary and increasingly powerful odour of goats.

I saw Alan sniff, and some instinct warned me that he was about to comment on it ; an even deeper instinct made me nudge him and lay a hand on my lips in warning. He understood.

Our guide finally stopped in a particularly fine cavern, well lit with oil-flare lamps, its floor now pretty well ravaged by his explorations. He obligingly indicated the spot where he had found the jar and coins, and we soon forgot the man's repulsive appearance in his obviously expert knowledge, which came out in an animated discussion as to the

probable historical reasons for the burial of the hoard just after the death of King Offa.

I suppose we must have involuntarily sniffed despite our caution, for he said suddenly, "Ah, yes, you can probably smell goat! It's only the pet companion of my labours."

Turning towards a corner in the shadows, before we could make any comment on this surprising piece of information, he croaked :

"Asmodeus, come here, old fellow!"

There was a patterning of hooves, an uncanny bleat ; and there trotted into view, from some other cavern whose entrance we could not have noticed, a most noble outsize in billygoats.

"I call him Asmodeus after the famous demon, you know," said the ancient cleric with a queer chuckle—and I could have sworn the beast pricked up its ears and knew every word he said.

Alan and I exchanged glances that communicated a mutual opinion that we had better make friends with the beast and act as though there was nothing unusual in a retired clergyman being kept company by a goat on an excavating expedition.

"I hope he's friendly," said I with an assumed jocularity. "The last goat with which I tried to get on good terms simply butted me into a village duck-pond, and I've been a bit scared of them since."

Asmodeus looked at me reproachfully, and I am ready to this day to swear that his beard bristled up. He tapped up to me and actually put out a fore-hoof, which I shook gravely, whereat he gave a pleased bleat that had in it the suggestion of a nasty chuckle.

Alan bent down and patted him gently on the

head, trying hard to disguise a look of repulsion, for the creature stank to high heaven as only a goat can, though its coat was snow-white.

Asmodeus gave a grave nod, as though to say he was pleased with this reception of him, and retired respectfully to stand immediately in his master's rear. There he remained till we had finished our examination of the cavern-flooring, and the discussion about the hoard.

"Well, we had better go down now and see the coins," said the Rev. Ashley Tudor—and before we even moved towards the passage-way, that infernal goat trotted forward to lead the procession.

"I say," I exclaimed, quite taken off guard by this, "that animal seems amazingly intelligent, Mr. Tudor!"

"Ye-es!" replied the old priest slowly, "he knows every word you say. He even knows whether one is thinking good or evil of him! Don't you Asmodeus?"

"Ma—a—aa—ah! Ma!" replied the beast, and trotted before us into the sunshine. It preceded us, with little consideration for the human foothold as compared with its own, down a vile and dangerous path among the loess to the bungalow, where it walked round our car, inspecting it and our worthy servants with evident disapproval.

The Rev. Ashley Tudor, whose appearance was something of an apparition to the Apostles, to judge by the scared expression of their faces when our party hove in sight, fished out a key from his waist-coat and opened the front door, into a passage as cluttered with pottery and apparatus as the verandah. As he opened it, there emerged, even more power-

fully than in the cavern, that appalling odour of goat.

“The beast must live in the place with him,” I thought.

The uncanny parson whipped round.

“Yes, Mr. Wayne,” he said with some asperity, “Asmodeus *does* live in the house. He is cleaner than many human beings and more intelligent than ninety per cent of the fools!”

This thought-reading gave me a shock ; I felt it safer to concentrate my mind purely on our archæological mission.

Opening a door on the right into a study surprisingly tidy after what we had seen so far, and crowded with learned books, our host waved a hand to a huge table, on which were laid out methodically, each on a card, and with some of the legends already copied on to the cards, the coins of his hoard.

“As you see,” he said, “I’ve already started on the classification ; but a few points puzzle me, and I shall be very glad of your expert help.”

For the next couple of hours, the mutual task drove out all the unpleasant impressions we had formed, especially as, when motioning us to take chairs and begin our examination, Mr. Tudor had surprisingly lit up some kind of a brazier and thrown into it a form of incense, remarking that we naturally couldn’t be expected to be accustomed to the aroma of a goat, as we didn’t live there. So, with this, and all three of us smoking pipes, friend Asmodeus was temporarily forgotten.

What the wretched creature was doing in the meantime, I have no idea ; but the door had been left ajar, it being summer, and finally he butted it gently open, stood on the threshold, and tapped

twelve times with a hoof on the wooden floor.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the priest, "it is noon. He has come to tell me, you see. You really must have something to eat—I have plenty in. What about your servants out in the car? I'd quite forgotten them."

We thanked him, and accepted for ourselves, but I knew that on such expeditions as this the Apostles always brought their own snacks and a thermos flask which, I happen to know, contained something stronger than tea. However, I went out to see if they were all right, and found them seated comfortably on the mossy grass playing chess, to which they were much addicted, with a pocket set.

"Gor lumme, guv'nor," said James, a somewhat superstitious Cockney, "I wouldn't go in that 'eowsie, beggin' your pardon. That there 'eathen goat's bin a-sniffin' rahnd us till it fair give me the cripes, it did!"

Being permitted to have their own snack in privacy, the good fellows were much relieved, and I left them to it.

I must do our peculiar host the justice to say that for a bachelor in the wilds he put up an excellent lunch, apparently single-handed, and the man was certainly deeply learned in the archaeology of his district, no less than in the technique of cave-exploration.

We obtained valuable information from his find of coins, obtained his ready permission to use it in our book, and got on to discussing the question of the gap between the Roman occupation and the Anglian, comparing the ancient Derbyshire mines with those of the Mendips, and so on.

Finally, the meal over, the Rev. Ashley Tudor led us into another room, kept in perfect order as a museum, remarking, "Now I will show you something really curious."

In splendid isolation on a raised pedestal in the middle of the floor stood a Roman altar, some three feet high, of the type you find on Hadrian's Wall. In an instant we were on our knees to examine its dedicatory inscription, which, to our astonishment, was to a compound-deity of whom we had never heard anywhere else, "Apollo Lugtus"—obviously a mixture of the Latin sun-god Apollo and his Keltic counterpart, Lugh, god of the mid-summer festival.

"Good-heavens!" exclaimed Alan, "this is one of the sensations of the century, to students of Roman Britain! Why on earth haven't you published it in the *Journal of Roman Studies*?"

Mr. Tudor gave that queer, unpleasant chuckle—and we were startled to hear in our immediate rear the sarcastic little bleat of his wretched goat, which had hoofed into the museum in our wake.

"Well, —er, you see," he said, "for one thing, it is not long since I found it; for another, I find it far too—er—interesting, to want it carried off from its native surroundings."

"There is more in this than meets the eye," I thought to myself. "Most scholars would have itched to get the thing deposited safely in one of our national museums." I asked, aloud :

"Is it permissible to ask where you found it, Mr. Tudor? It looks as if there ought to be a fine Roman villa somewhere around, by this altar."

"Oh, yes," he replied instantly, "there is no secret about that. I found the altar—or rather, dear

Asmodeus found it" (here that vile animal gave a bleat of self-satisfaction) "in that inner cave from which you saw him emerge this morning. You see, he found the cave, nosing around while I was exploring the one outside it, from which the coins came."

I observed that a contraption like a porter's barrow, on which the altar had evidently been wheeled down from the cave, still stood just inside the door, but thought no more of it at the time. I was to recall the fact later with vividness.

There was much else in the museum-room to interest us, and before we realised how time had sped, we were having tea with the learned cleric. We then tried to make our excuses, saying we had detained him far too long, but with almost pathetic eagerness, he begged us to stay, pointing out that we had a long June evening before us to see other caves he had found, and that he had plenty of room, if only we would stay the night.

"But what about our two servants?" said Alan, "we shall want them to assist in the hill-climbing, from your description of the inaccessible nature of some of the caves, but we can't possibly expect you to find room for them, also. Besides, what about the hotel, where we have already booked rooms?"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Mr. Tudor. "I assure you I have room for all, and I shall be deeply disappointed if you don't stay—for to-morrow I shall have an archæological marvel to show you, one which you will be the first scholars in all England to see—nay, the first *people* to see in nearly 2,000 years!"

I began to think the vulture-faced old scholar

slightly mad, but my curiosity was piqued. Anyhow, he added sanely enough :

“I suggest your men, if one of them can drive, go back and tell the hotel people you will not be returning there tonight—I am not on the telephone.”

There seemed no other course open, so I went out and instructed James, who was a good driver, to do this, making sure he would find his way back easily. Fortunately, both James and John had an excellent ‘bump’ of locality, and I had no qualms on this score. They were enjoined to return as soon as possible, as their services would be needed with the climbing tackle. At first they were respectfully rebellious against the idea of sleeping in the weird old parson’s bungalow, but I reassured them and promised them they would not have the goat for company, so off they went ; and until their return we passed the time with our host in going over a large-scale map he had made of all the caves on and around Cademan Tor, that he had so far discovered.

Here Alan triumphantly got on his place-name hobby horse.

“You know, Mr. Tudor,” he said, “it’s queer you should find that altar in a cave on a hill named Cademan Tor. Apparently the first part is the common Saxon names Cædmon, but the Keltic Tor belies it, and I have been wondering if—”

“Exactly,” broke in the cleric with an imperious wave of his hand, “I know just what you are going to suggest : that the Cademan is a corruption of the Keltic roots *Cadh moin*, meaning, the Holy Hill.”

Alan, now as much the victim of the uncanny old man’s thought-reading powers as I had been, registered astonishment, and agreed that this was in his

mind.

“Yes,” said our host gravely, “and there is more in it even than that. Happily you will be with me to see the result of an unique experiment tomorrow morning at sunrise—may I remind you that it is Midsummer Day, the Day of Lugh, the Keltic Apollo ?”

Our car now roared up the spring-racking track, the Apostles having safely completed their mission ; and within half an hour they were assisting the three of us in a perilous scramble along the face of the cliff-like hill with ropes and grapples.

Until it was nearly dark we explored cave after cave with our amazing host, who had the agility of a man of twenty, and uncomfortably reminded me of a goat himself in his flair for footholds where we could see none.

Supper in his bungalow, at which he democratically insisted on James and John joining the table, was a pleasant enough meal in the soft lighting of oil-lamps, and for this brief space the Rev. Ashley Tudor seemed almost the country vicar or rector he was alleged to have been, drawing out our rather tongue-tied servants, helping them to excellent beer, talking to them about their past careers, their service as army batmen, and how they liked taking part in queer jobs connected with history. By the time they had been shown their room, furnished with a couple of camp-bedsteads (as also were ours) they had quite overcome their terror of the goat, who was nowhere to be seen or—mercifully—smelt! I heard John remark to James as they retired that ‘the old cove ain’t so bad arter all.’”

Tired with the bracing Derbyshire air, we turned

in early to the rough but substantial comforts of this lonely mountain camp, our ancient host lighting us to our rooms with a guttering oil-lamp and the peculiar wish that we would "Sleep well and await Apollo," which I took to be a poetic way of saying, look for the sunrise—though somewhere in the back of my mind was a vague misgiving that caused me, I think, to sleep more lightly than usual. As for Alan, it would take a ton of bombs blowing up the Great Pyramid about his ears to wake *him*.

Whatever the cause, I slept very lightly, as I say, and was a prey to uneasy and confused dreams in which Shining Apollo and the wretched goat Asmodeus were accompanying the Rev. Ashley Tudor in a ludicrous dance to the tune of Greek pipes around the altar of Apollo-Lugtus, which somehow seemed to be in the cavern on Cademan Tor. Dimly I thought I heard a hoarse scream, instantly stifled; I half-woke, but dropped off again, fancying the sky was getting lighter.

It *was* a scream I had heard, though how long before, I could not judge, as I woke up suddenly in that warm balmy dawn one so often gets in June, at once sensing that something was wrong. Alert on the instant, I rushed to the next room, and with difficulty succeeded in rousing Alan.

"There's something wrong in this place, I'm sure of it," I whispered.

I ran across the wooden passage to the room allocated to the Apostles. They had vanished. The camp-bed clothes were strewn violently all over the floor, as though there had been a struggle, and one of the camp-beds had collapsed on the floor.

The room into which our host had turned after

bidding us good-night was likewise empty ; his bed had not been slept in. The air there was foul with goat-scent.

I looked in the museum-room. Both the altar and the porter's barrow had vanished.

"Quick, Alan, for God's sake!" I gasped, dashing back to his room, "quick, man—we may just save them! Sunrise—Midsummer Day—Lugh!"

I was beside myself with apprehension, and incoherent ; but my colleague grasped what I meant, and flung himself into a dressing-gown and shoes, while I rushed next door to do the same. Into my pocket I slipped a small revolver I always carry—a habit born of much wandering in queer places.

We flew across the rugged ground and scrambled up the side of Cademan Tor in the ever-growing light, making direct for the cave of the coins.

Almost as we reached its mouth, there came a frightful, heart-rending yell, as of someone under torture, followed by a diabolical goat-bleating and a wild insane laugh.

The sun was rising, streaming from due east into the mouth of the cavern, its first rays falling on a terrible sight in the centre of the cavern floor.

There stood the altar we had seen the night before in the museum. On the altar squatted the great, evil billygoat Asmodeus, facing us ; and behind it, on his knees in an attitude of obscene worship, was the Reverend Ashley Tudor, stark naked except for a gorgeous ecclesiastical cope round his shoulders and the clerical collar still round his neck, kissing the foul creature's posterior—giving it the notorious *osculum infame*, or Kiss of Shame, the act of adoration to Satan in the ancient black magic. In his

hand he held a curved sacrificial knife.

On the floor at the foot of the altar, bound hand and foot, lay our two dear, faithful servants, the Apostles, about to be offered as a living sacrifice to the hellish powers.

I saw red. I drew my revolver and fired into the vile body of the vulturine priest, as he was about to draw the knife across John's throat, then at the diabolical goat, in rapid succession, while Alan dashed forward to see if our men yet lived.

A crash like thunder reverberated through the cave ; the spits from my weapon were followed by two bursts of sulphurous blue flame—*and both priest and goat vanished.*

As Alan dragged James and John clear, I fired again, shattering the altar of Apollo to fragments. The air was full of an appalling stench of goat, cordite, sulphur, and burning human flesh.

“He’s gone! That fiend’s escaped! See if he’s in the far cave,” yelled Alan. I did not move, however.

“No,” I said, “calm yourself, old man. He has gone where I hope we shall never see him again.”

Tenderly we unbound our henchmen, so nearly slaughtered by the vanished madman, and helped them out of the cave to rest on the grass and recover from their ordeal. Of the two of us, I think I was the less stunned, for I had more realisation than my friend of the significance of all this.

“Come and sit down a bit, old fellow,” I said, taking Alan by the arm.

Out in the air, with the sun now risen in all his splendour, unseeing, on the polluted spot, we collapsed on the rough ground.

“Now listen, Alan,” I said, as calmly as my rage would allow. “You will never see the Reverend Ashley Tudor or his goat again. They have gone back whence they came—to Hell. That priest *did die a year ago*, I am convinced. From what we’ve just seen, we know now he was a Satanist, and that unholy animal was the Goat of Mendes.

“How he did it, I don’t know, but he possessed a secret even occultists today know is not lost : he kept alive on earth, probably by vampirism, a visible image of himself—his thought-form, if you like.

“Before his actual physical death, I think, he had found this altar because he knew where to look for it, he knew what it meant. Has it occurred to you that the brother of Apollo was Hermes, and the son of Hermes was the goat-foot Pan of the Wild ? Pan, the spirit of all living things, who lives on all things living. Pan of the light and the Darkness, who in his latter aspect became the Devil of the Christian Church. Perhaps, you didn’t notice, but there was something very queer about that altar. Scratched in *sgraffito* one one side of it, away from the normal inscription all would read, was this :—

**DEO APOLLINI
LVGVTI
TENEBRARVM
MARCVS ÆLIVS
V. S. L. M.**

“You know its meaning, of course : to Apollo, Lugh of the Shadows, Marcus Aelius put this up in fulfilment of a vow. I only noticed it just as our host turned away to point out something else to you in the museum, and thought I had better keep quiet about it then.

“Our coming thus at the moment of sunrise, the crucial moment of sacrifice to the ancient Lugh on his midsummer festival, and my firing, broke the spell. By some mysterious means, it has caused that evil thought-form of the satanist priest to dissolve for ever—and with him what I can only believe was an evil elemental in the form of the symbolic goat, which with grim humour he had named after the demon Asmodeus.”

“Do you feel like coming back now into the cave for a minute?” I asked in conclusion, seeing Alan was regaining something of his self-possession.

“Yes,” he whispered. “We nearly had the murder of those two poor fellows on our conscience—and if we hadn’t brought them, it might have been us.”

We returned to the scene of Satan’s holocaust.

“As I thought,” I remarked, stooping to pick up from the floor an object for which I was searching.

It was the clerical collar, all that remained of the Reverend Ashley Tudor, M.A.

“See this, Alan,” I pointed out to him: “The only material thing about him. Even his cope has gone. I wondered why he kept the collar on, though coatless, digging on a hot day, when we first set eyes on him. This collar is covered with celluloid coating, but it is made of *human skin*—the satanic charm which at the last availed him nothing.”

“My God!” exclaimed Alan, “perhaps that explains the superhuman strength which he must have had to transport the altar up the mountain single-handed at dead of night.”

The Apostles, though shaken, were now able to walk. Slowly we helped them down the mountain-

side, dragged our footsteps back to the valley, and collected our property from that evil house ; we drove unseeing through the beauteous scenery back to Castleton, and thence to get into touch with the police and the appropriate coroner.

What a nation-wide sensation our evidence would have created, had there been an inquest ! It would have provided the greatest puzzle ever known in English law, as to what verdict the coroner should bring in, on the alleged decease of a man whose death-certificate showed him to have been deceased over a year, yet who had undoubtedly tried to commit the double murder of our faithful servants. We saw the coroner, and, being a wise solicitor, he decided to do nothing whatever !

The only simple thing about it was the coins, which the coroner declared Crown property, and which we were subsequently able to get into a museum.

THE NYMPH STILL LIVES

Most of the ancient thought-forms which have crossed my path from the ever-living mind of the Past in the course of my antiquarian studies have been unpleasant ; but there is one at least that stands out in the memory as a thing of sweetness despite the eerie sense of unreality that surrounds the experience.

If anyone with a taste for ancient majesty and noble scenery wishes to take an unusual holiday, I can thoroughly recommend tramping the Roman Wall of Hadrian—and I *mean* tramping, not just taking a car along the Newcastle-Carlisle road south of it and making occasional walks to the “star” spots on the Wall.

The only way to see it in its splendour, to feel the might and majesty of old Rome, is to start from Newcastle and, as did the great Dr. Collingwood Bruce some 90 years ago, follow the Wall itself with grim determination, up hill and down dale, with his published guide-book, till you gaze on its ending : a long mole flung, almost with a gesture of defiance, out into the Solway from Bowness.

Even for one with very little archæological knowledge, the Wall can be full of interest. At Housesteads, the ancient Borcovicus, the fears and upsets of the third-century panic come back to us with vivid force as we see how the garrison reduced to half-width the ancient gates, where we can still observe the deep ruts worn by the chariots.

In the great ditch on the north side, which the Roman engineers dug with relentless perseverance even along the impregnable heights above the lowlands, clean through the hard basalt rock, we can see lying to this day one colossal block with the dowel-holes still remaining, the only block that defied even Roman ingenuity to move after it had been quarried.

At Gilsland, on the border of Northumberland and Cumberland, there still lies by Tyne the Popping Stone where Sir Walter Scott proposed to his bride ; and if you are lucky enough to run across the aged Lowland shepherd who looks after the site of Borcovicus, he will tell you weird tales of how Arthur and his Knights still sleep beneath the crags called the Nine Nicks o' Thirlwall, ready to awake to England's need when the Chosen One shall find the cavern and blow the hunting horn.

It was at Borcovicus that I aroused the superstitious horror of this good old man when, a few summers ago, I decided after many years to tramp the Wall again. My friend and colleague Alan Granville, also in need of a change after the months of close research work we had been doing together, had gone off to Italy, so I was alone.

These "star turns" of the Wall, fortresses like Borcovicus, all seem to be miles from any civilised accommodation ; and as I flatly declined to drag my legs another five miles to find a village, I casually told the old shepherd that I thought the cave just outside the fort, known to have been a temple of the oriental sun-god Mithras, would be an ideal place to sleep, with my knapsack as a pillow. The old fellow was terrified, and swore I should not come

out alive next morning—for a dim memory of the old gods yet lives in this wild countryside:

Awake I did, however, with the dawn next day, after an excellent night's rest, and made an early start, as I wanted to retrace my steps a few miles to the adjacent "station" of Procolitia, and devote a day to it, since I had passed it rather late in the afternoon.

My chief interest here lay in that extraordinary deity, the purely local goddess or nymph known as Coventina, to whom unique inscribed altars have been found here ; and these, with an extraordinary collection of objects from her well-spring, are all to be seen in the beautiful little museum three miles away, founded by that great antiquary John Clayton at his house, Chesters, itself on the site of a Roman station.

Nowhere else in all the Roman Empire is a site of the cult of this happy sprite known. Here, into her well—which has been excavated, and includes a great underground chamber—the rough soldiery threw their hard-earned *denarii* in grateful recognition of some granted boon ; women safely delivered of a child—or perhaps safely escaped from having one—threw their pin ; and at least one man cured of an affliction to his right hand threw in a beautifully-modelled bronze hand, a pagan custom that has persisted to this day at shrines of healing saints in southern Europe.

I had spent all the morning in a highly technical examination of the site, making notes, measurements and drawings, and enjoyed an ample if rough, lunch from my knapsack. It was a boiling hot July day, and the heat seemed to radiate even from the Roman masonry about me.

Idly I stood over the well-site, wishing the water still ran in it, that I might quaff the waters of the happy nymph instead of having to trudge to the stream at the other end of the site. Some whimsy prompted me to throw down the well a perfectly good French ten-franc piece that I had received in change (to my disgust when I discovered it) from a wily Newcastle tobacconist, and which, unfortunately, refused to fit several cigarette-machines—I tried it on about half a dozen the night before I left Newcastle on this tramp.

“Ah, well!” I thought fancifully, “it’s no good to me, but here’s an offering to you, Coventina—a coin as of old, if only in gratitude to all the gods for this glorious day and countryside.”

Suddenly I felt very, very lazy. “Oh, blow refilling my water-flask,” I thought, “a doze is indicated.”

I sank down on that springy, mossy turf one finds all along the Wall country, with my back to the structure of the well, and, I suppose, must have been asleep in a few seconds.

I say *must* have been because, possessing a scientific mind, I cannot believe that what happened was anything but a dream—and yet I am not so sure.

I was awakened by a tap on the shoulder, and a light, cool hand on my brow, to behold to my astonishment a young woman bending over me dressed only in a completely transparent, flowing gown, girdled at the waist with flowers, and with a fillet of flowers in her hair. She spoke, in melodious Latin :

*Noli timere. Loci dea Coventina sum, amica tua,
quia meae aquae obolum dedisti. Felix sum.*

(Fear not! I am Coventina, goddess of this place, thy friend since to my waters thou hast made an offering. Happy am I!)

She straightened up, swung a garland of wild-flowers in her hand, and on the mead in front of me began a most graceful dance, the dance of sheer joy of nature. Watching her with mixed feelings of astonishment and desire—I, a bachelor scholar forty years of age, confess that I felt the latter almost for the first time in my life—I suddenly noticed that I could see not only right through her robe, but through her body, could see the distant plain to the south quite plainly as though she were not in my line of vision ; and as she danced, there came from somewhere a strange, primeval music of Pan's pipes. She sang to herself a wild, bubbling song, in a language I could not identify. It certainly was not Latin ; it sounded vaguely like Welsh!

Abruptly the pipes ceased in a sharp top-note wail, and with startling suddenness the nymph vanished from my sight.

I was conscious all at once that I was sitting there alone and wide awake, and an educated voice broke upon my dazed senses :—

“Well, he certainly looks a treat! Had one over the eight an' gone all classical by the looks of him!”

I looked up. Regarding me with amusement was a bronzed young fellow whose whole appearance spelt Undergraduate, wearing a pair of disreputable shorts, a khaki shirt, and a Balliol muffler ; and with him, a young woman clad in a plaid skirt and a tight jumper ; both were burdened with hikers' knapsacks.

Some instinct made me put my hand up to my head, and I fished from it a garland of wild-flowers,

skilfully twined—which I am ready to swear I did not make, and which most positively did not adorn my person when I sank peacefully down on the sward. I felt something hard in my left hand, and opening the palm, found myself grasping tightly a *sestertius*, the coin of the second-century soldier's daily pay, which, with equal certainty, I had not acquired in my exploration of the site—the archæologist John Clayton cleared it pretty thoroughly.

I must have looked an awful fool. I blinked and rose to my feet, grinning sheepishly.

"You didn't by any chance decorate me with this, did you?" I asked, holding out the garland.

"No fear," replied the undergraduate, "we've been watching you for the last five minutes, ever since we came up. You had the bridal garland parked on your top-knot and were beating the air, apparently in time to some music you were dreaming. Then you clutched the air violently with your left hand and closed it over something."

Somehow I felt it wisest not to exhibit the Roman coin.

"Anyway," I smiled, "as you can see, I'm not 'one over the eight' and I expect some other hiker put the garland on me for a joke."

"Well, we've seen nobody else for miles around—and you can see pretty far ahead, too," said the girl.

We let it go at that. I unobtrusively put the circlet beside my knapsack, and got into normal conversation with my new acquaintances, who proved to be from Balliol and Lady Margaret Hall respectively, both reading for a degree in Classics and possessing a good grasp of Romano-British antiquities. By the time evening grew late, we had become

quite well acquainted.

The couple both obtained their degree, I heard afterwards, with first-class honours. They are married now, and they spent a week-end of their honeymoon at our Midland manor-house a few months ago.

Only then did I tell them the real story of how I came by the garland, and revealed my possession of the coin.

The garland still hangs on the wall of my study, faded but intact. The only thing that puzzled my Balliol friend about the whole affair was the fact that the nymph Coventina appeared to be singing in Welsh.

“All I can suggest,” he said, before turning in with his bride, “is that these ancient, kindly spirits always have lived in the wilds, and still do—and that Coventina, who you remember was a purely local goddess, was *singing in ancient Keltic*.”

I think so too—but then why the devil did she address me in Classical Latin ?

THE BEAM

“What on earth is that?” I exclaimed, as a series of loud explosions and rumblings, followed by a sputter and then silence, sounded on the gravel drive outside our residence one afternoon.

“Well,” grinned Alan, “I suppose its owner, whoever he is, calls it a car!”

Putting my head through the open study window, I was treated to the spectacle of our old friend Father Manson clambering from a vehicle of very ancient vintage and rakish aspect.

I leapt over the low sill as a short cut, very glad to see the Dominican again, after an absence of at least a month since he had last dropped in.

“Well, Father,” I laughed, “you seem to be going in for the study of antiquity with a vengeance this time. Where on earth did you pick that up?”

He explained somewhat sheepishly that a friend had lent it to him, his own motor-cycle being out of order, as he wished to reach our rather inaccessible Wold manor-house quickly.

It was evident the old priest had something urgent to communicate, so I led him into the study by the orthodox route of the door, only stopping to give an order for tea to James.

Settled in what we had come to look upon as his special chair, Father Manson got his pipe going and lost no time in launching on his news.

“You see,” he began, “you fellows have had such queer experiences by accident, as it were, in the

course of your historical researches, that I feel you can help me in a matter which has left me non-plussed.

"You know that quarrying village, Mount Stanton, of course? Well, there are quite a lot of Catholics round there, and they have a district priest with a little tin church for the area. The priest is a friend of mine; he rang me up a few days ago to tell me that during quarrying on the great hill behind the village, the workmen have found a couple of Roman burials.

"That's interesting," put in Alan, "one of the best Roman cemeteries ever found in Leicestershire was not far away—just across the river; but there *is* one record of a Roman grave at Mount Stanton, found in the 'sixties.

"Probably," I contributed, "most of the signs of the Roman occupation were destroyed when that robber-chief Hugh Lupus built his castle on the rock—but you're not going to tell us the Roman burials are haunted, or something?"

"No," smiled Father Manson, "but one of the quarrymen is! I'm just coming to that. Anyhow, my priest friend thought I would be able to let you know as—wise men—you are not to be found in the 'phone directory.

"The priest added on the 'phone that there was another matter on which he was seriously in need of my advice, and begged me to kill two birds with one stone—see the relics, and help him—by going over as soon as I possibly could. He seemed rather mysterious about it, so I went at once, as it is not many miles from Leicester.

"We saw the finds—which are well worth a visit

from you, and which the quarry company is most willing shall be safely housed in a museum—and then in my friend's presbytery I heard a most remarkable story, which has left both of us very puzzled men. This is what he told me :

"A parishioner of his, a quarry worker rejoicing in the wonderful name of Montague Danvers Smith (he is alleged to be some sort of a descendant of the famous Danvers family of Swithland) has been to ask the priest's help, in a very distressed state.

"It appears that this humble workman has a daughter, a schoolgirl just under 14 years of age, and that their cottage has recently become the scene of a most unpleasant and violent form of *poltergeist* haunting. In addition to the usual features of that type of disturbance—you know, coal, furniture and crockery suddenly flung all over the place—a vile-looking thing they describe as like the arm of a hairy ape, but covered with loathsome grey-green hairs, rises by magic from under the table-cloth at meals and throws off everything, remaining poised above the table for a few seconds and then suddenly vanishing into air.

"Now the queer thing about it is this : these disturbances seem to be associated exclusively with the daughter plus the house ; when the business started—the child was reduced to a nervous, hysterical state, and no wonder—the doctor advised that she have a change of air, and she was sent off for a week to stay with her aunt at the seaside.

"While she was away, nothing happened either at the Mount Stanton cottage or at the aunt's. As soon as she returned, it all began again. For a second time they sent her away, with the same result ;

she came back last week-end, and the disturbances have resumed with increased violence.

"The parish priest has in vain tried exorcism. We went to the house together and attempted it, but with no better success. You know the Church's view—that things like this are evil spirits. I know you do not agree with that, but you will admit that it seems at least to be a very malevolent form of energy; and so, in view of previous cases within your experience that you have confided to me, I've come to you, as a last resort, to see if you can help—possibly trace something connected with the past (though in this very modern setting it seems unlikely) and get to the bottom of it.

"Anyhow," the Father concluded with his winning smile, "I know you won't be able to resist the temptation of a visit, if only for the inducement of the Roman remains."

We all sat smoking and thinking hard for a few minutes. Then :

"Did this upset start *before* or *after* the discovery of the Roman burials?" I asked, "and was this man Smith one of the workers concerned in their discovery?"

"Ah, I thought you'd ask that," said the Dominican, "it seemed to me, at first sight, the most obvious connection—but the trouble in Smith's house started two months before the men got anywhere near the site of these burials; and Smith works on a different section altogether—so there is no connection there."

We readily agreed to inspect both the finds and the 'haunted' cottage, and left it to Father Manson to arrange for a visit next day, as the area is but a

short drive from our home.

We duly arrived, and managed to get Smith as he was coming off duty for his dinner-hour. Father Manson introduced us and the man, a typical rough, honest-looking navvy in corduroys, insisted, with the true courtesy more often found in his class than among the so-called 'aristocracy,' that we join his humble board. He seemed very relieved that somebody had been called in to try and help his family.

"Yer see, genelmen," he explained, "me an' the missus is very fond of our kid—Eileen's 'er name—and we don't want no 'arm to come to 'er. I ain't an eddicated man, an' this 'ere's summat as I can't get to the bottom of—nor can 'is Reverence 'ere. The gel's just got a scollership an' this bloody business—beggin' your pardon, gents, but I feels strongly about it—is gettin' 'er nerves all to a frazzle an' mine an' the missus' too."

"I imagine it is, Mr. Smith," I said sympathetically, "and we will do what we can."

We thanked him genuinely for the offer of dinner, and were soon at his cottage, kept in spotless condition by a hard-working, pleasant-faced wife, to whom, as also to the victimised daughter, we were soon made known.

Eileen was a pretty girl, with an extraordinarily-developed figure for her age, not quite fourteen, and a wide intelligent head; she was obviously happy and fond of her humble parents. We did not broach the matter in hand till we were all comfortably seated at table.

We then got Smith, encouraged by the priest's presence, to tell us all he knew about it, then the daughter.

"I can't understand it, sir," she said addressing me in particular, "it started about two months ago, with me being thrown out of bed one night. Then next morning at breakfast all the things was—I mean were—thrown off the table ; and during the morning it was in the 'olidays—holidays—I was helping Mum get coal in and great lumps came flying through the air. After that, every night for a week I was knocked about in bed—sometimes I felt great hands pull me out by the hair.

"An' it was after a week of that as we sent 'er to Auntie's," put in her mother, "for the poor dear was near mad with it."

They related how peace followed her departure, and renewed violence her return ; and having got them warmed up to the subject, I judged it discreet to introduce the matter of the remarkable hairy arm.

"'Orrible it was!" declared her father, "I seed it meself, an' I'm not a drinkin' man, am I, me duck ?" (his wife agreed warmly that he was not).

"It was like something right out of 'Ell itself," he declared dramatically. "and pore Eileen, she faints when she seed it the fust time."

"Very strange," I said, "do you know, somehow, when this thing is coming, Eileen, or is it always sudden ?"

Sometimes, she replied, it came without warning. At others, she had an awful premonition that the Thing was there, waiting its chance to rise and play havoc with the table.

"It would be most interesting to see this weird arm," remarked Alan injudiciously.

Eileen went very pale, and let out an ear-piercing scream that made us all jump up.

"It's coming!" she yelled.

Almost as she cried out, the centre of the table-cloth went up like a cone, the remains of the meal and the whole of the crockery went flying, and an invisible hand grabbed the cloth from below, flinging it off.

There arose to our amazed eyes, practically out of the centre of the very table, but hovering above it, a most appalling object—a loathsome, ape-like arm, just as had been described, covered with long grey-green hairs and ending in a cruel hand furnished with long talons. It was like the arms in the devil-drawings from an illustrated edition of the *Jackdaw of Rheims*.

Father Manson feverishly began the prayer of exorcism, telling his beads—but it had not the least effect on the Thing, which hung quivering over the table for fully three minutes. I noted with surprise that the Father had omitted to have any holy water with him, but I doubt if it would have been much use against an elemental thought-form of this kind.*

I lurched across the table and made a grab at the arm, but as I did so, it vanished like smoke.

Eileen, who had fainted, now regained consciousness, with the aid of her mother's ministrations, and whispered faintly: "It's all right now, I know it's gone."

"Don't you think she'd better go and lie down a bit on her bed, Father?" said Mrs. Smith, addres-

*In a long practical experience of occultism, I have actually known cases where—contrary to the cherished belief of the average writer of occult fiction, who usually has no experience of these matters—Christian holy-water is useless against malevolent elementals. M.P.D.

sing Father Manson.

He was about to agree, when, struck by the development of an idea I had been turning over in my mind, I interposed :

“No, Mrs. Smith—not there. Get her on the couch in the front parlour, then I’ll tell you why.”

When the mother returned after leading the still-shaken girl away, I said :

“Now, Mr. and Mrs. Smith! This weird, horrible business, as you will well be able to agree, is something connected closely with the girl and the house at the same time. When they are apart, nothing happens.

“It therefore seems to me that there is something in this house—call it some kind of wave-vibration, like wireless, if you like, to use simple terms for it—for which your poor daughter acts like a receiving-set. So far as I can see, this is quite an ordinary cottage, and not very old, but perhaps you would allow us to see Eileen’s bedroom. I have a feeling that the cause of the trouble may be centred there.

“You see,” I added, feeling it incumbent on me to explain in non-scientific terms, “when we are asleep, that part of us which is called the subconscious mind comes uppermost, and it is more easily a prey to these queer forces than the conscious mind we use when awake ; and Eileen has said it all started with her being thrown about in her room.

The parents consented at once to our inspection, and led the way up the stairs to a room at the back, which they indicated as Eileen’s bedroom, and we all trooped in. The floor sounded very hollow, and I at once crossed to the window, to find that, as I thought, the room was built out as an addition to

the house ; and craning out of the window, I could see below the two thick brick pillars which supported it over the back garden and yard.

“Ah, Mr. Smith,” I said, “this room seems to have been added on to the house later ?”

“Whoi, yes, sir,” he answered at once, “I’m a ‘andy man with bricks—was ‘prenticed as a brick-layer—and I put it up meself in me spare time to make a bit more room an’ give me a shelter over the yard for me macklin’ jobs, seein’ as ‘ow I owns me cottage and nubuddy to say me nay.”

“And a very fine job you made of it, if I may say so,” I rejoined tactfully.

I looked round outside the room, and caught Alan’s eye as his gaze, like mine, travelled up to a noble oaken beam running right across the ceiling. Alan ‘signalled’ me to go on with the conversation, for Father Manson, deep in thought, was gaping at the beam with his mouth open and looking slightly ludicrous and fish-like.

“That’s a fine bit of oak you got hold of to put in there, anyhow,” I remarked to the proud handyman. “It’s very, very much older than anything else in the place, if I’m not mistaken in the tooling I can see on it. Do you know where it came from?”

The good workman suddenly went as white as a sheet and trembled all over.

“God almighty!” he gasped, “I do believe that’s what’s the cause of all this ‘ere. Danged fule as I was, not to ha’ thought on it afore!”

He took out a huge and singularly unæsthetic red spotted handkerchief and mopped his brow.

“Aye, genelmen,” he went on, “thet theer beam come from the owd Sillington Mill down in the valley,

as was burnt out a few years back. I bought it from the feller as owned the plaace—an' its always said hereabouts as the owd miller about fifty year back 'anged 'imself in the mill."

"Then," I said, "we've solved the whole mystery. You see, what we call a thought-form, connected in some mysterious way with that miller committing suicide, has remained attached to the beam—I shouldn't wonder it's the very beam on which he did the hanging. If you can manage to shore up the ceiling while you replace it, and *chop up and burn the beam*, I think you will have no more trouble at all—and if I were you, I should have Father Manson and your parish priest here when you do it."

The poor fellow was most grateful, and with that we felt our mission was ended.

As we climbed back in our car, Father Manson fired at me :

"Why did you suggest the Church should be present at the burning, Gregory ? I always thought you were a hard old agnostic on these matters!"

"Well," I replied slowly, "since my experience with the Unholy Relics at Toulouse, as to the violence of elementals, I'm not so sure as I used to be!"

Two days later, the priest came over again, heralding his arrival as before with many groans, stenches and explosions, to tell us that the burning had been done next day, and at last the house was quiet.

"Strange," he said over the inevitable tea and muffins, "how the dying agony of a man can be translated into a dangerous emanation ; and stranger still, how it can be rendered malevolent by the presence of an innocent young girl ! Can you wonder

priests don't marry?"

"Go on, you old joker!" retorted Alan. "Have you got that burial pottery to the museum yet?"

THE HAUNTED HELMET

Alan Granville stood in the wide, stone-flagged Tudor hall of our manor-house in the Leicestershire Wolds with hands thrust deep into dressing-gown pockets and a curved pipe in his mouth, looking even more than usual like Sherlock Holmes. The morning sun streamed down and stained him many-coloured through a fine window of fifteenth-century German glass we had picked up a few years before on the Continent.

“What is biting me learned colleague?” I asked jocularly, emerging from the dining-room.

“I was just thinking, Gregs,” he replied, “that the one thing lacking to complete the atmosphere is a nice suit of armour. It would go splendidly in that corner there, guarding the staircase.”

“Yes,” I retorted, “and where the devil do you think that we, not being Randolph Hearsts, are going to pick up a genuine suit without going bankrupt—you know what they cost, I suppose?”

“Oh, rather!” he replied airily, “only when I went up to Nottingham to give that wretched lecture at the University last week, I happened to see a suit going quite reasonably in a good antique shop—Mason’s, you know, where we’ve often bought odd things.”

I inquired cautiously what he called reasonable, and whether he had made sure the suit was genuine.

“Only £250,” Alan replied, “you see, it’s all of one period—late 15th to early 16th century—but it

has been made from different parts ; for instance, the elbow-guards don't quite match, the gorget-piece is from a different suit, and the helmet from another."

"I should think so, for that price!" I exclaimed, "why, you couldn't get a *pukka* complete suit for much under £700."

I was as anxious as my colleague to see a suit of armour in our hall—a sneaking fancy I had harboured in silence, for fear of being laughed at, for some time, in fact—and as our last joint volume of historical labours had produced quite a good sum from its subscription method of publication, I felt, as he did, that we might spread our wings a little without touching other capital or the income from it. Anyway, I was not going to let a bargain like this pass without an effort. So within an hour and a half, we were off in the car to Nottingham.

We knew the antique dealer well, a thoroughly straightforward man, who flatly refused to deal in fakes.

"Ah, Mr. Granville," he said, "I wondered if you'd be back—and pleased to see you, too, Mr. Wayne. You don't often give me a visit these days."

"Well, Mr. Mason, for one thing we've been very busy, and for another, we have about all we need in the way of period furniture and so on—you've sold us most of it, you know ; but Mr. Granville told me about the suit of armour you have, and that's the one thing we have been wanting to complete the layout of the manor-house."

"Ha! precise as ever, Mr. Wayne," chuckled the old man, no mean scholar himself, "now most people would have said 'the manor'—but we don't

catch you tripping. Funny, isn't it, how many folks seem to think a manor meant the house, not the area the lord ruled?"

He prattled on pleasantly, leading the way meantime round a perilous stack of furniture to the back of the shop, where stood the armour. It was certainly very skilfully made up, and showed the style of a late ceremonial tilting-suit.

"Did you make it up yourself, Mr. Mason?" I asked.

"No, sir. I can tell you its exact provenance. Curiously enough, I got it just as it stands from a place called Warcott Hall, in north Nottinghamshire. Seems they've had it standing there for years and years—one of the family about 1850 was by way of being an antiquary, and apparently collected the bits; well, he made a good job of it, as to period. You know what it is, these scandalous death-duties forcing old families to sell their treasures. Still, the present people have no brains or culture—you may know their name, the Mandelays."

We did. Who has not got sick and tired of seeing the couple of inane-looking, fast Mandelay wenches huntin', ridin', shootin', dancin', and generally queening it, in the sickening pages of certain brainless illustrated papers? If the gossip-writer creatures let a week pass without mentioning them, it is little short of a miracle.

We felt really glad that the Mandelay armour had passed into worthier hands, though we regretted the thought that the money it fetched would probably be wasted in more dogs and horses for slaughtering foxes with, or in the cocktail-bill.

After an hour's technical examination, mixed with

talk of the family high-stepping, we decided to purchase, and our honest old dealer produced his receipt. He didn't mind admitting that he had bought the suit for £150!

A cheque and the ironmongery changed hands, and we carted off our purchase in triumph. It must have looked a comic sight, the shell of a warrior reclining in the back of a modern car, with its knees up—for having a somewhat bizarre sense of humour, we arranged it like a passenger—but we cared nothing for that, and were all anxiety to get it home.

The armour, which needed no more than a rub over, certainly did full justice to its setting. We agreed it looked, in the jargon of people like the Mandelay wenches, "too utterly baronial"; then, having got over our first enthusiasm, we reverted to our scientific selves and subjected it to a leisurely examination piece by piece.

The most curious thing was the helmet. We had noticed in Mason's shop, and remarked to him, that it did not seem a helmet which one could put to practical use, for the chin-piece, instead of being hinged, was firmly riveted to the skull-piece; so were the visor and the *mesaille*, the plate which comes over the brow to join the visor.

"It looks suspiciously to me like a funeral helm," declared Alan, "though of course I'm not disputing that it's in period all right, and it *looks* right for a jousting helm, even down to the crest and plume—which plume of course is the only modern thing about the whole outfit. You couldn't expect a plume to last from the sixteenth century, anyway."

The crest alluded to was a sitting lion, in wood,

fixed into the top of the helm. For the non-technical reader, a word is necessary on what Alan meant by a funerary helm. A custom grew up late in the sixteenth century of having a model helmet, very often made up from pieces of genuine ones, put with the shield, gauntlets (often themselves models) and sword of the dead knight or squire over his tomb at his funeral.

You may still see some of this funeral armour in our village churches ; the custom lasted until late in the 18th century, when we find dummy swords and poor silvered helmet-models knocked together from any old iron handy.

“Well,” I said; “that in itself is a curiosity, anyway ; but I wonder how the antiquary of the Mandelay family got hold of it, unless of course he claimed the helmet from some ancestor’s tomb up at this place Warcott.”

After this, well satisfied, we left our new acquisition in peace and retired to the study for the evening.

About eleven o’clock—we are late birds, and like working often until the small hours—James knocked at the door and burst violently into the room with a gasped apology, his face like putty and his eyes bulging, his customary dignity utterly vanished.

“Good lord, James, whatever’s the matter ?” I inquired.

“Oh, Gawd, sir!” he spluttered, “it’s that there suit of harmour wot you brought ‘ome today!” When excited, poor James’ carefully-nurtured *h*’s went wandering.

“What on earth do you mean ?”, I asked testily. “What’s the matter with it ? Has it fallen down and given you a fright, or something ? Come on,

man, do pull yourself together!"

"Nn-no, sir!" he stuttered out, "its the 'ead--the 'ead's out there in the 'all a-walkin' about in the air all by hitself without no body—and John's seen it too!"

"Impossible," declared Alan and I together. "Have you been drinking, James?", Alan asked severely.

"No, sir, s'welp me Gawd I 'aven't," he protested, "if you don't believe me, sir, come an' see for yerself."

There seemed nothing else for it. We rose and followed him into the great hall—and there, in mid-air, was the helmet from our suit of armour, apparently wandering to and fro as though it capped an invisible body. John, almost reduced to a state of gibbering, sat on an oak settle gasping at the thing.

"Well I'm damned!" said Alan. "James, I owe you an apology."

"So do I," I added hastily. "No wonder you got a shock."

James, mollified, was recovering his dignity and his grammar. "What do we do about it, sir?" he said addressing nobody in particular, "do we try to catch the thing, or let it come to rest when it feels like it?"

"I think," said Alan, "we'd better leave it alone, and see what happens by morning—but really, my man, there's nothing to be afraid of."

Our Apostle looked at us rather reproachfully, as though *he* at any rate was not accustomed to such unorthodox behaviour on the part of antiques. He and John departed to their quarters, having respectfully inquired if they would be wanted again.

that night.

When they had gone, Alan mused : "I wonder if it *is* really the helmet, or if it's an optical illusion in the moonlight ?"

"Oh, we'll soon test that," I replied, and, stepping to the foot of the staircase, put out my hand to the suit of armour. The helmet was quite definitely missing! Yes, there it was, in and out of the moonlight and shadows, careering steadily round, most uncannily remaining at a steady shoulder-level.

Gradually its movement grew less animated, and it returned nearer and nearer to the remainder of the suit. Finally, it came to rest with a decided, metallic *clank* on to the shoulder-piece of the body.

Then a surprising thing happened. There came a deep groan, apparently from within the suit of armour ; the helmet now shook in a violent convulsion on the shoulders, the whole structure rattled, and the legs—though we had fixed it firmly on its stand with straps and mounting-stanchions—kicked wildly out in the air. The helmet rose, as though some unseen occupant of the suit was being suddenly whisked up by the neck in a noose.

We stood spellbound, hidden in a deep shadow of the staircase, wondering what would happen next ; and by now, we were scarcely surprised when the arms of the cumbersome plate-armour rose painfully to the helmet and went through the motions of trying to wrench it off an invisible head.

"Come on," I whispered to Alan, "let's rush it—then if anyone's playing a joke inside that suit, we've got him."

Stealthily we crept round, one each side, and 'rushed it'—and proceeded to look a pair of fools,

each clasping the armour round its middle, and finding it void of any occupant.

I felt a cold shiver run down my spine, though, as the arms fell in a sudden collapse and clash to the sides, one hitting each of us on a forearm.

We retired, completely defeated by the phenomenon, and decided that we had better leave it, as neither of us had any wish to sit up all night watching the thing.

“Tomorrow morning,” said Alan, firmly, back in the study, “we go over to Nottingham and discover just how much old Mason knows about this!”

We did, but all we got out of the dealer was a sad smile and a queer, grave look.

“It’s extraordinary,” he said. “Do you know, only a few days ago, I came down to find the helmet lying beside the suit, though I had mounted it all up firmly for display. Naturally, I thought my cat had been rampaging about—but what you tell me puts a different interpretation on it. Honestly, gentlemen, I had not a notion there was anything queer about the suit in that way. Sir William—that’s the head of the Mandelay family, you know—merely said, when he called me in, that he had got to sell it for family reasons ; those were his exact words, I remember, and naturally, I took them to mean that, like so many other old families, they were feeling the pinch.”

Mr. Mason made the very constructive suggestion that we should go over the Warcott Hall and interview Sir William, warning us that he was a crusty, peppery old fellow and that we should have to go carefully.

We decided to telephone first, finding that the

Hall was on the 'phone, and a cultured voice answered. It proved to be young Geoffrey Mandelay, the son and heir, who explained that "the guv'nor" was away, but he would be glad to see us and tell us anything he could—we had merely explained that we had bought a suit of armour that had come from the Hall, and as historians, would be grateful for any information obtainable about it.

Our car soon ate up the fifteen miles or so across Sherwood Forest to Warcott Hall, and as we halted on the drive in front of a singularly ugly Queen Anne stucco facade, there strolled across the lawn to meet us the son of the house. He, it appeared, was down from Oxford for the Long Vacation, and was attired in flannels and swinging a tennis-racquet.

"Come in an' have a gargle," he said hospitably, "then tell me what you want to know—too damn hot to talk out here."

He led the way into a cool, spacious Georgian hall and bawled for "George," whereat a butler made his appearance and was commanded to bring beer.

"Now," said Geoffrey, swinging a leg over a chaise-longue, "I understand you are the chaps who bought our armour from old Mason. You needn't tell me what you've come for—I bet the damn thing's been doing its tricks again!"

"Oh," I gasped, "so you *do* know about it?"

"Good God, yes!" said the young man frankly. "Too tell you the truth, that's why the guv'nor's got rid of it—not that he has much taste for antiques anyway; but it wasn't a question of bein' hard-up or anything like that.

"You see," he went on, only pausing now to interject "Here's all the best," as our welcome glasses

arrived," I'm reading History at Balliol, and I've gone rather deeply into the family's black past."

"It transpires to start with that our revered ancestor, one Sir Everard Mandelay, was one of the national heroes and martyrs of 1605—*i.e.*, he was one of the noble band of far-seeing men who tried to blow up James' fool Parliament in Gunpowder Plot, and *lost his head* at the Tower in consequence. His Christian name, and other facts I've unearthed, point to his being a relative of the Digbys, several of whom as you know were also mixed up in it—one with fatal consequences also.

"Now Sir Everard was buried in the family vault in Warcott church—I'll take you over afterwards if you like, as it's only across through the grounds. They put up a rather vulgar recumbent-effigy tomb to him, which is still there, and according to an early-eighteenth century Notts. antiquary's manuscript notes which I unearthed in the Bodleian, his funeral achievement, consisting of helmet, gauntlets, and sword, was hanging over the tomb complete in 1725.

"About 1840 my great-grandfather started amassing a vast collection of antiquities here in the house, and he has left it on record in his papers that he got the then Vicar—being the squire, he could bully the parson of those days into obeying any orders—to let him have the helmet and gauntlets to complete a suit of armour he was making up from bits he'd picked up all over the shop.

"Great-grandsire apparently regretted his church-looting, for in 1842 his diary contains a queer note. I'll go and get it."

Geoffrey disappeared up the staircase, leaving us

to digest our beer and gaze on the vision that now appeared silhouetted very revealingly in the doorway. This, we realised with distaste, was the much publicised and over-photographed Miss Phoebe Mandelay of the gossip-fools. She now lounged against the doorway, clad in practically transparent tennis-shorts, very short indeed, inspecting us as though we were some new and strange species of insects.

We rose politely, but the young wretch merely drawled a casual "Mornin'" and passed on indifferently through a door at the end of the hall, with the usual manners of her kind and class.

Young Geoffrey now returned, clutching a leather-bound volume, which he opened at a page marked by a slip of paper. He handed the book to us, and we read, in the copper-plate hand of his antiquary-ancestor :

1842 "An extraordinary disturbance in the house
May this last two nights, which I cannot by any
9th. means account for ; we heard the sound of
shrieks and groans throughout each night,
and the next morning I found my suit of
armour, that I have so laboriously assembled,
twisted upon its stand in the most grotesque
contortions ; the helmet lying beside it upon
the hall floor."

May "I am utterly unable to understand this mys-
11th. tery of the armour. For two more nights
now the phenomena have repeated them-
selves, and I can only suppose that it is some-
thing to do with the fact that the helmet and
gauntlets, though earlier than his period,

hung over my beheaded ancestor Sir Everard's tomb ; but I cannot give them back to the vicar, for fear I should look foolish if I attempted an explanation, and be thought a prey to superstitious nonsense."

May 17th. "The nightly disturbance and noises having become almost unendurable, and the servants half-dead with fright and threatening to leave, I am perforce driven to dismantle the armour and store it in the lumber-room ; a sad disappointment, but no doubt I shall find other pieces later with which to make a suit."

"You see,' said Geoffrey, when we had done reading this recital, "the thing beat the old boy ; and in the lumber-room that armour remained till I got busy when, on coming down for the Long Vac. three weeks ago, I found this diary in the library—the guv'nor had never even seen it, and he's no brains for anything above sporting books and the *Justices' Manual* to help him sentence poor poachers, anyway.

"On reading of great-grandsire's troubles, I at once went rooting round a filthy and god-forsaken attic nobody seems to have entered in this generation, found the armour—in a sad state of rust and disrepair—cleaned it, an' set it up again with my own lily-white hands!"

"Well, the trouble started all over again, exactly as the old boy describes it, when the bally suit had been parked gracefully in the hall only forty-eight hours.

"The butler came tottering into the library after dinner the next night, and we thought he was going

to throw a fit. He announced that the helmet had been waltzing round his head in the air, and alleged that as he went to pass the suit on the stairs, the arms shot out and a pair of cold steel hands—the gauntlets, no doubt—tried to clutch him round the throat.

"Of course we wouldn't believe him, but as true as I sit here, when we trooped into the hall, there was the ruddy helmet cavorting about at head-level just as if Wells' invisible man was wearing the thing."

Alan and I laughed heartily, and recounted our own almost identical experience.

"Ah, but that wasn't the worst," grinned Geoffrey, "my wretched younger sister Phoebe—you probably saw It, when It went through the hall just now—kicked up a hell of a row the next night. She came dashing into the billiard-room half-naked, simply clutching her dinner-frock round the upper storey, and announced that as *she* was goin' upstairs to get her gaspers, the darned suit's arms reached out and tried to rip her dress off. She added that it cost twenty quid, and that as I had set up the suit, 'what was going to be done about it?'"

"Next morning the parlour-maid threw a faint—declared she'd seen the hands go up and lift off the helmet, after which the legs struggled violently. She gave notice on the spot.

"Obviously, the thing was getting a bit beyond a joke, so that night I decided to risk an experiment—sort of see if I could lay the spook, you know. So after dinner I slipped away, got into a tight fencing suit, and girded myself in that suit of armour to see what would happen. What did happen was a damn sight more than I bargained for. There came a fearful jerk, as though my head was being wrenched

off at the end of a rope.

"I must have let out a dreadful yell, for everybody came running, and the next thing I remember was lying on my bed being brought round, with the doc. bending over me along with the guv'nor, and saying, 'He's had a narrow escape. What happened? Did he try to hang himself? Look here—this is queer—there's a red mark like a thin knife-cut right round the back of his neck, too!'"

"Well, I was in bed all next day with shock, and my neck hurt like hell. When I got up, the guv'nor told me that when everybody poured into the hall on hearing my yell, they found my arms and legs flailing about all over the place. I fought like a madman—it took the butler and the chauffeur to get me down—and for some time they couldn't get the helmet off because they couldn't stop my neck being wrenched back and forth by some unseen force.

"So there it is," the young man concluded. "The guv'nor said he was getting rid of the suit before it found itself in the dock on a charge of murdering somebody; and furthermore, servants were hard enough to get already, and the whole staff had sent in an ultimatum that either the armour went, or they did.

"No," he added sadly, "he wouldn't even let me park it in my rooms at Balliol. Anyway, let's hope it taught that extravagant little bitch Phoebe a lesson about buying expensive frocks—she'd borrowed the twenty quid from *me* to get the one that got ruined, and that's the last I shall see of it, I suppose!"

"You weren't by any chance inside the armour the

night it did *that* damage, were you?" asked Alan with a twinkle in his eye.

"Shut up, you fool, she's comin' downstairs!" growled Geoffrey. "Have some more beer."

THE OFFICER'S COAT

A few years ago, I had occasion to inspect the documents of a very ancient north-country family living in one of those desolate Lancashire stone manor-houses that lie among the hills round Blackburn. After we had gone through two muniment-chests of which my host was very proud, he suddenly had a fit of energy and decided, as he had in me a tame records-worker on the spot, to see if anything more of historic interest could be discovered in the gable-attics, filled with the lumber of at least two centuries. At the end of an exceedingly dirty afternoon at this, we were lucky enough to unearth an oak chest which, we lamented, was of the plain, ugly type of about 1730.

It was locked, but we were easily able to force the lid, and fellow-enthusiasts may judge of our joy at finding it apparently crammed full of still more old papers and parchments.

We had lifted out several armfuls, however, when the supply suddenly ceased ; my hands hit some soft cloth. This on being disinterred, proved to be a finely-preserved scarlet military coat with gold-lace facings, and though it was much too late for my periods of study, I put it down as dating from somewhere about 1790 to 1820.

My host could not identify it, and, though he had succeeded his father in the estate more than thirty years before, had no idea whether or not it had belonged to an earlier officer of the family or not. So we took it downstairs for a clean-up.

The garment proved to be so handsome a specimen, entirely free from moth-ravages, that I at once thought of a friend, Peter Sands, who is a recognised authority on costume of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and has one of the best collections in England. My host at once consented to his being asked to come over and inspect it, as he also lives in the north of England.

The upshot of this was that Sands was wired for, arrived next day and, by the time we reached the port at dinner, had persuaded my host (who like nearly all landowners in these days was feeling the pinch) to part with the coat for a handsome sum. The expert pronounced the garment as undoubtedly that of an officer of the 2nd (Royal North British) Dragoons—better known as The Greys—dating from about the time of Waterloo.

Full of elation, he carried off his prize to his bedroom in a flat cardboard dress-box, fastened up with string all ready for transport.

Next morning at breakfast, I thought Sands looked somewhat quiet and thoughtful, and he asked our host a number of leading questions, endeavouring to get a clue to the origin of the coat, but without any light being forthcoming.

As we were smoking our post-prandial pipe in the garden, he turned to me suddenly, when our host had excused himself to see the gardener, and said :

“Damn queer thing happened last night, Wayne.”

“Why,” I replied, “did those wretched owls wake you up? I had a job to get to sleep for them.”

“Owls, no!” he snorted, “something happened I wouldn’t have believed possible—that army coat *came to life.*”

"Now, look here, Sands," said I, "I can stand having my leg pulled so far—but no further. Do you mean the thing got out of its box and did a dance or something?"

"No. To be serious, old man: it was a most peculiar experience, and somehow I feel I have not seen or heard the last of it yet. I woke up, just in time to hear some clock strike two, to find a man sitting on the bed looking at me, smiling, and *wearing that coat*. In fact, he was in the full rig of a Greys captain of 1815.

"Well, I pinched myself, and felt sure I must be dreaming, as the result of my prize capture; but no, the figure was real enough, and as soon as he spoke, I realised it.

"'Do not be afraid', he said, in a most cultured voice, 'I have come to tell you how glad I am you have found my coat. I know you will tend it carefully. I have long waited for someone to find it who should do so'.

"I realised by this time that I was talking to what I suppose would be called a ghost—and that it was a golden opportunity to find out something more.

"'I shall certainly cherish the uniform,' I heard myself reply, 'but would you mind telling me who you are—or were?'

"'I am Captain John Barnby,' the figure replied. 'I fell at Waterloo, after more than seventy of my brother-officers and men had fallen.'

"'But you are not of the family here at the Hall,' I said. 'How comes your coat to be here?'

"He smiled sadly. 'She whom I loved was of this family', he answered, 'a comrade brought home my coat and told her I should not return. If you

examine it closely tomorrow, you will see a bullet-hole through the lacing near the left breast. My loved one, Charlotte, never married. I am happy now.'

"Before I could utter another word, he had vanished. I sprang out of bed and rushed over to the dress-box. There it lay just as I had taken it upstairs, with the string untouched, and on opening it, I saw the coat lying just as I had folded it."

I told Sands that in my view the re-discovery of the uniform had in some mysterious way caused a "thought-form" of its owner to materialise to his vision, but he left with his treasure, a sadly-puzzled costume-expert. He decided to say nothing to our host, whose wife was of a nervous disposition, as we did not wish to alarm the household with any hint of ghosts.

However, there are two sequels. The first is that a few weeks later, on compiling the pedigree of this Lancashire family, I discovered that a daughter, Charlotte, died unmarried in 1817 aged 20.

The second is that Sands was right : the matter, for him, did not end with his strange vision.

He came to spend a week-end with Granville and myself about three months after this occurrence, having dropped a brief note that he had some curious information to impart.

It transpired that in the previous week Sands had been called in to inspect, and advise upon the repair of, a number of 18th-century dresses discovered in a Yorkshire manor-house owned by a Mrs. Entwistle, widow of the lord of the manor ; they had turned up in an old powder-closet found by accident during repairs to an attic bedroom.

In the drawing-room, says Sands, there was a fine collection of miniatures, which, while waiting for his hostess, he at once proceeded to admire with the eye of a connoisseur.

“Suddenly,” he told us, “I nearly fainted with shock—to see the face of none other than my Waterloo captain, in what might have been the identical coat, looking at me from one of the miniatures.”

“When Mrs. Entwistle came down, I said, as easily as I could: ‘I know who *that* is, Madam,’ indicating this portrait.

“‘Impossible,’ she smiled. ‘There are three of those miniatures which have no visible inscription, and which no-one has yet managed to identify, even in the family. They are all mine: that is to say, I brought them with me on my marriage from my family home.’

“‘Nevertheless,’ I persisted, ‘I know who that man is. I have his uniform coat, and have spoken with what I can only suppose to be his spirit. He was Captain John Barnby, and he fell at Waterloo.’”

Mrs. Entwistle, Sands says, turned quite pale, and rested for support against a table.

“This is uncanny,” she declared. “You of course did not know, but my maiden name was Barnby, and my old home was their manor-house, near Blackburn.”

The old lady, when she had got over the shock of Sands’ recital of his experience, was determined to see the matter through. She got him to get the back off the miniature, a delicate and difficult task; and inside they found an inscription:

“JOHN BARNBY, ESQR. W. Smithers *pinxit. Anno 1814.*”

BORGIA POMADE

“Oh, lord, will this business never end ?”, I groaned, tossing over to my collaborator Alan Granville a letter which had just come. “Ever since that wretched book of ours on the development of the English manor-house appeared, we’ve been having this!”

The cause of my groans was this : ever since our book had been published three months before, we had been inundated with letters from the owners of noble old manor-houses up and down the country declaring they were absolutely *positive* there *must* be a priest’s hole concealed in such and such a part of the house, because there was a thickness unaccounted for—and so on, *ad nauseam*.

This was another of them, one John Holben, Esquire, of a place called Chaffington Manor, Northants.

“Anyway,” said Alan, “it does seem more interesting than most of them. For one thing, he doesn’t claim the usual priest’s hiding-place ; all he thinks is that there may be a room ingeniously concealed behind the Tudor fireplace he’s discovered on stripping the wallpaper to restore the walls to half-timber.”

“Yes, yes,” I said testily, “but why the devil do all these folks seem to think we’re a couple of architects ?—Still, I suppose we asked for it, writing a book like that.”

However tired of it we were, we could never resist

the temptation to investigate all these mysterious places ; so down to Chaffington Manor we went.

As it happened, Mr. Holben's problem did prove of considerable interest, for measuring, followed by our breaking through the wall beside the huge chimney-breast, did reveal not only a lost staircase to the upper part of the house, but a secret room of quite decent size, most ingeniously built in, and having a window which we certainly could not identify from the outside.

By this time we were all three thoroughly filthy with dust and plaster, and Mr. Holben insisted that Alan and I have a good clean-up, stay for lunch, and examine the re-discovered room afterwards.

At lunch our host presented his wife, a very handsome and dignified woman of about 30, some years younger than he, and with a fine complexion that obviously owed little to art.

She proved, moreover, as cultured as her husband, and a real enthusiast for their splendid old house ; and somewhat to our surprise, insisted that when we resumed our exploration, she was going to take a hand.

“My dear, you'll get absolutely black in that hole!” protested her husband.

“Ah, that's where you're wrong, darling! You seem to forget I do most of the garden-pottering. What about my old slacks, a jumper, and weeding-gloves ??”

So we all gathered in procession up the narrow stone staircase skilfully cut in the thickness of the wall, and five minutes later, were busy searching the room, which had evidently not been entered for at least a century—if not far more. A modern vacuum

cleaner works wonders, and when we got the grime and cobwebs down off the walls, we found in one corner a tall wooden cupboard, the door of which had lost its key, but proved amenable to a little gentle prising.

We gallantly left it to Mrs. Holben to have the honour of opening the door, and when she did so, she gave a little cry of surprise and pleasure.

There on a shelf, covered with a thick layer of dust, stood a glowing piece of pottery, a jar something like a ginger-jar but not so wide, made of the rather coarse and garish-coloured faience ware known as Urbino, which was first made about 1470, and reached its height as a fashion in pottery in the mid-sixteenth century.

I happened to be nearest, and at once offered to lift down the jar, to save Mrs. Holben getting its dirt all over her.

Now I am not what one calls a particularly psychic person, but I do think that the queer experiences I have had, with some of which the reader of these pages is already familiar, have somehow developed a latent 'sensing' of occult atmosphere.

The minute I picked up that jar, a cold shudder ran right through me, and I nearly dropped it on the floor, for the jar felt *warm and slimy*, as though it were covered with blood.

In that instant, a sudden flash of vision came to me. The garish Urbino colours disappeared, and I *saw* what I knew to be human blood trickling over the sides of the vessel.

The scene, the people, in that ancient secret chamber in England vanished . . . I was back in a renaissance palace of sixteenth-century Italy.

Facing me was a tall, powerfully-built man dressed in the finest velvet of the time, with a huge, cruel lower lip and terribly decayed teeth. He was laughing evilly, and holding a jewelled dagger, from which the blood was still dripping . . . Then I saw, clutching him by the shoulder, a woman whom I knew to have been beautiful, but whose face was now half eaten-away by some foul disease.

"Quick, catch that jar, he's fainting!" said someone.

I came round to find myself lying on the floor in the room with the Holbens and Alan bending solicitously over me, Alan sprinkling water on my face and my hostess holding the jar.

"Put it down, put it down!" I muttered, "Murder, blood, cling to that pot!"

"Hm! A touch of fever," I heard Holben say, his voice sounding a mile away, "Better get him down on to a couch—very stuffy up here."

When, down in the lounge, I fully recovered, feeling an awful ass for the exhibition I had given, Mrs. Holben had gone off to make tea, and her husband was sitting on another settee facing me and looking at me very curiously. Alan was standing at the table, examining the jar but not, I noticed, touching it.

"Now, Mr. Wayne, if you feel better," said our host, "I feel very curious to know what exactly happened. You see, I have lived in the East for some years—one gets used to queer things there. No need to feel foolish about it, my dear fellow. Do you mind telling me exactly what you *saw* that caused you to mutter remarks about blood and murder?"

I sat up, apologising for having caused so untoward an interruption in the secret room, and told him exactly what I had witnessed.

Before I realised it, Mrs. Holben was standing in the doorway, and she must have heard everything, for she came forward, followed by a maid with a tea dumb-waiter, and exclaimed :

“Oh, Mr. Wayne! Some of you historians do have a vivid imagination. I think it’s a perfectly *sweet* jar—Urbino, isn’t it?—and I shall use it for face-cream on my dressing-table. It will look lovely there!”

Her husband looked very thoughtful, but all he said was : “Well, my dear, you do it at your own risk. Personally, I think there is more in these queer things than you give credit for—but you always have been a sceptic!”

When a woman makes up her mind to a thing (I have been given to understand by misguided individuals who have married) there is nothing more to be said.

We all examined the pomade-jar together ; my flash of the fey had gone, and there now seemed nothing sinister about it. I did, however, take particular care to inspect every inch of the vessel for any hollow part or concealed spring, but it was quite evidently solid and honest in workmanship. A perfect Urbino piece of that period (about 1500 to 1600 A.D.) is hard to obtain, so we left Mrs. Holben gloating over her jar, and her husband over his secret room—and, having much else to do, on our return home Alan and I quite naturally forgot all about the matter.

We were destined within a week to be rudely re-

minded of it, however ; for on coming down to breakfast six days after our visit, I found addressed to me a brief but harrowing letter from our late host.

Dear Mr. Wayne, (it ran, under the previous day's date) Can you possibly come down ? A most terrible thing has happened. My dear wife broke out the day after you left, in a fearsome skin disease. Our doctor called in Brandson, the skin specialist, at once, but he said he had never seen anything like it. It spread rapidly in a rash even while he was here. Next morning she woke me up screaming and clawing at her eyes. Her face looked as though it was half-eaten away, as if by a rapid leprosy. I rushed off for the doctor in the car. When we got back Mrs. Holben had disappeared, but the doorway of the secret room stairs was open—and in that room we found her, lying on the floor. In her hand was clutched a torn vellum manuscript. I can't read it but I'm sure this and that cursed pomade jar are at the bottom of the business. For God's sake come down and help me.

I passed the distressing letter over in silence to Alan, who remarked : "Poor devil ! You at least must go, Gregs even, if I don't—and somehow I think you'd do more good on your own, for it was you who had the queer vision connected with it. I fully expect you will find the manuscript is in medieval (probably dialect) Italian, and you're much better at that stuff than I am."

I hurried over breakfast, and in little over an hour reached the stricken manor-house.

Holben did not wait for a servant to answer my ring. He rushed to the door himself, grasped both

my hands, and broke down in trying to thank me for coming so quickly.

Mrs. Holben had been rushed off to hospital, but the specialists and doctors had confessed themselves utterly floored by the weird eruption that had transformed Mrs. Holben, from a woman known throughout the county for her beauty, into a horror on which one dared not look. It was no skin disease known to medical science. They had even called in, without success, an expert from the Ross Institute, which probably knows more about tropical skin-eruptions than any other institution in the world.

"The jar! The jar!" groaned Holben, "God, I daren't touch the thing. They took some of the face-cream for analysis—she cleaned and used the pot, as she said she would, the day we found it—but the cream is absolutely free of any kind of poison. It's still on her table in the bedroom."

By degrees I got him calmer. I spotted a decanter, and made him take a very stiff peg of his own whisky. He was making a noble effort to pull himself together, and when he finally succeeded, I said gently :

"I won't offer empty condolences—after all, she may recover. I know just how you are feeling, and like you, I was afraid something would happen—but I did not bargain for this. I take it you would like me to try to read this manuscript you say your wife was found clutching, to see if it puts any light on the matter?"

"Yes, yes!" he replied eagerly, welcoming anything which would keep his mind off what must have been an appalling sight for him. "I'll get it."

He crossed to a bureau, and returned holding gingerly by a thumb and forefinger a yellow scroll of vellum with one torn, jagged edge.

"Where on earth my wife found it, I don't know," he said. "I have never set eyes on it till then. My theory is that in her agony she got some sort of vision, rushed to the secret room, and found it there."

"Well," I said, "before I examine it, I can tell that tear is new ; I have an idea you are right, and that she did get a sudden vision telling her she must find this thing—and that the rest of it is still somewhere in that room. Do you feel equal to helping me look for it ?"

The stricken husband agreed eagerly ; it would give him something active to do, so up we went.

Instinctively I made for the cupboard where we had found the fatal jar—and there at the back of it was revealed a sliding panel, that had evidently been opened by the unfortunate woman ; we must have missed it in our search. Jammed in the grooving was the rest of the manuscript. In agony and terror Mrs. Holben must have wrenched at the document, and pulled away half of it before she collapsed into merciful unconsciousness.

We took the piece down to the lounge and fitted it to the one we had in silence. Alan was right ; it *was* in slightly archaic Italian, but so clearly written that it gave me no trouble whatever. I translate literally the story there written down, etched in lines of acid hate. It read :

KNOW all men that I Ambrogio, being a bastard son of that Pope of Hell, Rodrigo de Borja, that men call Alessandro the Sixth—one of the many such spawn he hath cast upon the world through

his mistress Vanozza of the Romagna—have set this down, that ye may know the deserts and fate of faithless women.

Despised of men, forbidden the palace and mine opportunity in the world, living upon a pittance flung contemptuously by his Holiness, gaining no ear of Justice, since she (corrupt harlot of the great) now sits enthroned in the person of him who did me the wrong of causing my birth, I long schemed for the death of him and of the Vanozza.

This failing, I sought to compass the ruin of one Giovanna, another mistress of Alessandro mine evil father, the one which he loved—if so foul a creature can indeed love—even more dearly than the Vanozza ; and thereunto, I repaired in secret first unto Messer Guido da Castel' Durante, that exceeding cunning potter of Urbino, who at my bidding fashioned for me a vessel of the kind wherein vain women keep their face-creams.

It was no ordinary unguent-jar this, for the powdered bone-ash, that the potters do use to put in their glazing, was brought to Messer Guido by me. This was bone-ash of the human dead, whose bodies I took by night from fresh graves in the Campo Santo ; the which were burnt, and a new-born babe distilled alive therewith, by my friend Messer Domenico Pantaleoni, most skilled of all magicians of the Romagna. He and I alone knew what was in my bone-powder, and to the making of it had gone divers powerful spells and curses.

With me upon the day appointed for the firing of this my vessel, he repaired with me unto Messer Guido's workshop, and over the jar in the furnace performed divers rites and incantations.

secretly, whereof the effect is, and ever shall be, most fatal and hideous to women, whatever their repute.

This vanity-pot, then, sent I unto the fair Giovanna, as in the name of another of her bedmen, with a bribe unto her handmaiden than she do well observe her mistress' use of it and what should follow.

Within two days the Pope's lovely whore possessed but half a face, and that a seething mass of disease and corruption ; and within two more, the bells tolled the end of her agony.

All this learned I from her handmaid, she coming to my bed that night and lying naked in my arms ; but in her sleep she did mutter as if telling Alessandro who had done this thing, wherefore I knew that she had betrayed, or would betray me. I slew her with my dagger as she slept.

Then gaining entrance to La Giovanna's apartments with the maid's key, and while her foul corpse yet lay there, I recovered the death-jar, my trusty friend. It remained with me, close hidden in a secret cabinet, three years or more, till having prospered, I took unto me a woman.

After some little time, it came to mine ears that she was visiting him whom I thought my best friend ; I bided my time till proof came, whereon dissembling, I gave her the pomade-jar as a birthday present. Two days later I sent for my false friend to gaze upon her—or what was left of her face that he had loved too well..

Thus cursed be all women, for there be none good among them ; and may all to whom this pretty plaything come, thus feel the power of its

curse and become as lepers. So shall Ambrogio the Bastard, the despised, be revenged upon the world. Dated at Castel' Durante this 10th of December, 1498.

"God! What a fiend!" exclaimed Holben when I had finished reading out my translation. "To think that a curse could be laid, so powerful that it has lived on for over four centuries!"

"Yes," I replied quietly, "but four centuries are a mere nothing in the duration of evil thought-forms. What about the Egyptian curses which appear to operate after nearly five thousand years?"

"I wonder," I added, "who last experienced this thing in your house, and how the jar came here. Someone evidently knew its evil, or the thing would not have been so carefully hidden away where they thought no-one would ever find it again."

"Ah, now you mention that," said Holben, "I recall that our title-deeds, over which I was looking recently with my solicitor in connection with selling a small farm, do contain a counterpart of the lease of the manor-house—speaking off-hand, I believe the date was 1782 or so—to an Italian, Signor Utrillo, who was (I have heard) a political refugee from Rome. He probably brought that damned jar with him."

The poor fellow shuddered and for some minutes sank huddled in his chair, overcome by his memories. Then suddenly his self-control left him again, and he burst into a wild fit of sobbing.

"Christ!" he screamed, "why should *my* wife, who is no loose woman, but a true and loving companion, be taken by this evil thing. Why were we ever allowed to find it? Is there no justice in the world?"

"Evidently Ambrogio da Borja thought not,"

I replied grimly, answering the last of his questions —the only one any man could answer, “so he set out to get his own justice by hellish means, reckless of possible repercussions on the innocent.”

“However,” I added, laying a consoling hand on his shoulder, “we will make certain that no-one else shall ever suffer for his wrongs. That, it is not too late to prevent, and I feel that we *may* be able to break the curse.”

Poor Holben looked upon me with a kind of dazed, dumb gratitude that cut me to the heart.

I left him very quietly and got a maid to show me her beloved mistress’ boudoir. On the dainty dressing-table stood the jar, glowing evilly at me.

Taking it up, I hurled it through the open window to crash in fragments on the crazy-paving of the garden below.

In my left hand, I found, I still clutched the terrible Italian manuscript, of which my copy now reposed in my pocket. This I took down to the kitchen, where I persuaded Cook, agape with astonishment, to let me stand over the grate until I was sure that its evil had been consumed in the all-purifying flame.

No, there was no diabolical laugh from the depths of Hell over my shoulder as I watched the parchment shrivel ; indeed, as if in proof that good life and a pure heart can overcome even the malevolence of the Things beyond the grave, there came within two hours a telephone call from the London hospital—a much puzzled house-surgeon told Holben that his wife’s skin had suddenly started to clear, in a manner almost miraculous ; and on receipt of a joyous invitation to visit the Hall a few months later, I was again greeted by a lovely and radiant hostess.

AN ABBOT'S MAGIC

It was not by chance that my colleague Alan Granville and myself chose the rolling east Leicestershire uplands for our home and the scene of our historical researches. The region has an air all its own, and a wide, spacious charm that grows upon the dweller in its midst ; and we love it best, not in jaunty spring or drowsy summer, but in the mellow autumn, when the distant coppices of its hunting-country are a kaleidoscope of tones and colours. Its ancient hilltop earthworks are then realms of mist and mystery and silence, and the wild legends of the district seem to come to life.

In imagination we can see once again the ghastly skeleton of Robin-a-Tiptoe, hanged poacher of old-time, dangling from the boughs on the crest that bears his name, his feet tapping out a *danse macabre* on the Tilton-Billesdon lane ; we ride again under the moon with the unquiet spirits of Eustace de Folville and his gang, hastening to murder the Justiciar in Kirby Fields when the third Edward was King ; and we wonder if we shall chance to meet, in the streets of superstitious Tilton itself, the ghostly form of Giant Johan Digby, mighty swordsman in the wars of the Roses, or hear in one of its old houses the eerie rappings of his descendant Sir Everard of Gunpowder Plot . . . but enough, lest this become a catalogue of folklore.

Well, late in September last year, after a glorious spell of Indian summer, we could see that the weather

showed signs of breaking up, so Granville proposed that we lay aside our books and pens for a day, and get out into our beloved rolling hills.

Readily assenting, I suggested that we might "kill two birds with one stone" by inspecting a mound known locally as Monk's Grave, on which I had just had an inquiry from the Ordnance Survey, near the wild hamlet which I will call Hamilton.

"Rather interesting, that," remarked Alan, as I was looking up the mound on the six-inch map while our ex-service manservant packed up provisions for the day. "Obviously it has nothing to do with monks: it *looks* like a prehistoric burial-mound, and if it is, local folk-memory has preserved the fact by tacking on this name, with a little confusion due to Hungerby having been a grange of Leicester Abbey."

Deciding on our cycles in preference to the car, we made leisurely progress over a countryside of wide vistas, fox-coverts, and teeming history, and duly inspected our mound, which proved to be definitely a ditched round-barrow of the type associated with Bronze Age burials.

"We ought to get the Archaeological Society to dig it," I exclaimed, "and there should be no trouble about a permit, if it's on Captain Mason's Hamilton land—I know him fairly well, and he takes a keen interest in antiquities."

"Ah, yes," said Alan, "I recall reading about his wife being killed in the hunting-field a few years ago—a queer business, that. She was the third wife of an owner of Hamilton to be killed the same way, within a few years. In each case, the rider struck her head on a low bough between here and

the Hall—looks as if there was a hoodoo spot somewhere round here!"

"Well, as we are so near," I suggested, "what about calling and approaching Mason about digging the mound?"

"Good idea!" my colleague assented, adding that we might at the same time ask permission to inspect the chapel which, we knew, remained intact from the days of the monastic grange, but which neither of us had ever seen.

We were soon at Hamilton Hall, which (save for a few dependent cottages) stands in splendid isolation on a little-used road that meanders, with many field-gates, across open country hardly changed since the days of the Anglian raiders.

Captain Mason was fortunately at home, and saw us at once.

"Why, Mr. Wayne," he said, taking my hand, "I remember our meeting last at the Archæological Society. I'm very glad you've at last come to see my old Grange!"

Apologising for the chance visit, I introduced my colleague, of whom our host only knew by repute. Over a welcome drink in the delightful medieval stone hall dating from abbey times, we readily secured permission to investigate the "Monk's Grave" mound, and were thus able at once to make our request to view the ancient monastic chapel.

This also was at once forthcoming, for the Captain, though he had only purchased the property on retirement from the sea a year before, was as proud of it as if his family had been rooted there for centuries.

"Most unfortunately, I won't be able to go round

with you," he said, glancing at his wrist-watch, "because I have some trouble on about repairs at a distant farm, and simply *must* meet my bailiff there at 10 o'clock—and it's now a quarter to ten ; but here is the key of the chapel itself. Go just where you like, and if you want anything, just ask Henry, the butler."

He rang for that functionary, instructed him to give us any assistance needed, and departed with haste but courtesy, enjoining me to drop him a line if we, as experts, found anything of striking interest, and remarking that he hoped we would find the chapel in a better state than he did on taking over—it had been disgracefully ill-used as a barn and farm-implement store, and he had just started to get the interior straightened up, we gathered.

Henry, grave, dignified, and elderly, plodded back to the hall after seeing his master off in his car, and stood respectfully awaiting any orders.

"Do you wish me to accompany you to the chapel, gentlemen ?" he asked, with a discreet little cough, "because if not, I'd rather not, if you don't mind, and will take no offence ; there is something about that building, sir" (turning to me) "which makes me shiver whenever I go near it!"

We could see that Henry was genuinely disturbed, and exchanged glances.

I smiled reassuringly at the old servant, and replied : "Why, certainly, if you feel like that, Henry—some people *do* find these old places a bit creepy, I suppose. No, I don't think there is anything we need—unless it's a torch, but perhaps the chapel is light enough inside ?"

"Yes, sir, very definitely," replied Henry, with what struck me as rather unnecessary emphasis.

"That, sir," he added, going to the window and pointing across the quadrangle, "is the chapel, and you can see the door between the buttresses on the right."

We thanked him, and made our way across the courtyard, I carrying the ponderous medieval key ; and we were both struck by the likeness of the building to the library range in Mob Quad at Merton—and like it, our chapel dated from the dawn of the fourteenth century.

A little gem of its type, the structure soon claimed our antiquarian interest, and we thanked Fortune that it had escaped the sacrilegious hands of Henry VIII. The door yielded readily to its key, giving evidence of a lock now oiled and cared for ; and inside it was evident that the new owner would soon repair the ravages of past neglect, for already the floor, covered (to our great joy) with 14th century encaustic tiles, was swept and garnished, and in one corner was a small heap of mortar and the weird impedimenta of masons.

The door was towards the western end of the south wall—the building formed the northern wing of the square, as in a cloister, and the sunlight coming in through its windows on this side showed up its simple beauty to great advantage. Looking to our right, we nearly shouted for joy (for antiquaries do on occasion exhibit almost human emotions!) to find the sanctuary, at the east end, possessing intact its medieval stone altar.

There are all too few of these pre-Reformation altars surviving, so we made our way straight to it, and found to our further joy that the consecration-crosses were still visible.

Alan was bending down on the south side, endeavouring to discover, from the style of the stone pillar supports, the possible date of the structure, when he suddenly straightened up with an exclamation of surprise.

"Just look here a moment," he said. "Have you ever seen *this* on an altar before?"

I bent down, following his pointing finger, which was directed at a design incised, in the manner of mason's marks, on the stone pilaster. I made it out to be the ancient magical pentacle, flanked on either side by the pre-Christian disc-and-crescent symbol representing the sun and moon.

"Extraordinary!" I exclaimed. "What's the idea? It looks as if some learned Augustinian canon, marooned at this wild country grange, had gone in for alchemy."

"However," I added, as the sun suddenly appeared to go behind clouds, for the building became unaccountably dim, "let us come back to this later, and inspect the rest of the chapel while there's any light left—I think a storm is brewing."

Alan remarked that there had not been a cloud in the sky when we entered the place ten minutes before ; and we strolled down the body of the chapel.

Before we reached the west end, however, a curious sound made us both look sharply round—the sound of suppressed sobbing, or rather blubbering, close at hand. We could hardly believe our eyes, for there, on the spot where we had just been standing, were the figures of a small boy in a black cassock, weeping, and a tall priest in Mass vestments who bent over him and held his hand. No one could possibly have got into the building without our see-

ing them, for we had been walking towards the one and only door.

My colleague moved as if to go back to the altar and challenge the intruders, but I laid a hand on his arm, motioned him to silence, and drew him into the obscurity of the south-west corner: for the place had suddenly become icy-cold, and there had come over it the atmosphere, indefinable but very real, that I have learned from long experience to associate with manifestations of thought-forms from beyond the grave.

Then a subtle change came over the scene. The sanctuary grew lighter and lighter, but it was a strange, roseate illumination not of this earth, not produced by any burst of sun from without. By it, we could now see for the first time the face of the priest, who straightened up. It was an evil, aquiline face, with sunken eyes and a tight-lipped mouth, which now creased in an unholy smile full of avarice. His whole form looked as substantial as that of Alan or myself; but that of the boy was curiously vague and shadowy, as if thrown on a screen.

The priest placed his hands on the shoulders of the lad, who had now ceased to whimper, placed him facing the west, and took from beneath his vestments some kind of small box, the contents of which he seemed to be rubbing on the boy's right thumb.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. The priest turned to the altar and opened his arms, as if in prayer. There was a blinding blue flash of light, and when he turned again to the west, he held in both hands a heavy volume, while on the altar itself there stood a chalice *upside down*, as in the Black Mass.

I shivered, wondering with horror if we were to look upon that supreme blasphemy of the Satanists ; but I could hardly believe my ears when, instead of a travesty of the missal, the priestly figure began to chant, in a fine baritone voice :

*Uriel, Uriel, invoco te angelus monetæ subductæ,
conjuro te creatura terræ thesauri in nomine
Adonai!**

The voice sank to a mere muttering ; a strange phosphorescent blue light shone about the head of the boy. The priest dropped the book on the floor—I realised with a kind of stunned surprise that it made no sound. He seized the boy's right hand, peering at it eagerly. Then suddenly, his harsh face creased into a grin of evil triumph, and he let out an insane, cackling yell of laughter that shook the whole place.

Everything swam about me at that unholy sound ; I went dizzy and clutched at the wall ; and when I recovered my normal senses, I found that Alan, his back slumped against the rough stonework, had fainted. Of boy and priest there was no trace to be seen. We were alone in the chapel.

My colleague soon came round, and, dazed and shaken, I got him outside, where the healthy sunshine beamed in a cloudless sky.

“I'm afraid I made a bit of a fool of myself, old man,” he said apologetically, “but tell me—just what in hell *was* that?”

“A more accurate question,” I replied gravely, “would be ‘what *from* Hell was it’!—I don’t know, but we shall have to find out. All I can tell you at

*O Uriel, Uriel, angel of stolen money, creature of the treasure of the earth, I invoke thee in the name of the Lord.

the moment is that the ghost, or thought-form, of the priest was indulging in an ancient ritual to discover stolen money ; he was chanting from the magical work known as *De Verbo Mirifico*, and using the boy's thumb-nail for a kind of crystal-gazing. The angel Uriel was supposed to preside over divinations for lost money."

"Well," said Alan, "I begin to sympathise with Henry the butler, whose dislike of the place I now thoroughly share. I wonder if he has really seen anything there ?"

"If he has," I opined, "I somehow don't think he would admit it ; and judging by his type, I think it wisest not to upset the old fellow by saying anything about it. As for telling his master, we had better leave that till we've done a little research."

As I spoke, somewhere at the back of my mind there was floating a vague idea that there was some record in print about this place, across which I must have run in the course of my historical record work ; but I could not place it. When I communicated this nebulous notion to Alan, he suggested that on our return home we should get into touch with our invaluable old friend Father Manson, the most likely source of any information of this kind.

Returning the key to Henry with thanks and a substantial tip, we cycled back to our manor-house in a rather subdued frame of mind, and I managed to catch the village post with a note to Father Manson explaining briefly what we had seen and asking if he could cast any light on it.

The worthy priest himself appeared "by return of post," arriving next evening on his malodorous and noisy motor-cycle.

"Well, well," he said, when comfortably settled in our study with a large glass of whisky and soda, before him. "You two *do* seem to run into things: I think, this time, I have found you the explanation.

"First," he went on, "have either of you ever examined Bishop Alnwick's Register in the Lincoln records?"

We had not, and said so.

Remarking that it was as yet unpublished, Father Manson dived into the recesses of his cassock and fished out a bundle of notes, which he consulted.

"This is very remarkable," he said, "because when, in December 1440 the bishop made his Visitation of Leicester Abbey, the canons brought before him their own abbot, William Sadyngton, on a charge of witchcraft, alchemy and divination, as well as immorality at a nunnery. "Here is the deposition of one of the canons:—

Also he saith that upon the Eve or Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle 1439, the said abbot, observing a damnable superstition, took unto him a certain boy named Maurice at Hamilton, and did there anoint his thumb-nail, telling him he should say what he saw therein; the said lord abbot having accused us all in open Chapter of stealing divers moneys from the abbey coffers and finding none that would thereto confess.

"Abbot Sadyngton," the Father went on, "was a bad lot. He was insolent to the bishop, refused to produce his credentials, and was the subject of complaint by every canon in the house. A little over a year after this scandal, he was deposed. By the way, in the abbey's library catalogue, which is in

the Bodleian, he figures as the donor of ten books ; only one was on theology ; the rest concerned alchemy and medicine."

"He was not the only medieval abbot to be charged with withcraft : two centuries before, a worthless abbot of Selby was accused of using a wizard to find the corpse of his brother, drowned in the river Ouse."

Alan Granville, who had been sitting with his chin cupped in his hands, gazing earnestly at the opposite wall, suddenly appeared to wake up.

"What did you say was the date of Sadyntyon's magical performance ?" he asked.

"The Eve or Vigil of St. Matthew the Apostle," quoted Father Manson, "which, for the benefit of you couple of heathen, was September 20."

"Hm ! Yesterday was September the twentieth, too," said Alan, crossing the room and tearing the sheet off the calendar.

"Well, well!" reminated Father Manson, re-loading his pipe and casting a meaning glance at the decanter "*there are 'more things in heaven and earth' . . . after all, you know.*"

“BRING OUT YOUR DEAD”

It is not often that the Post Office van favours us with a mid-morning call in our isolated district. On one memorable day last August, however, it swung up our drive in a cloud of dust and deposited a letter whose superscription, addressed to “Messrs. Granville and Wayne” (as though we were a firm of grocers or something) was written in a sufficiently scholarly hand to arouse interest. I happened to be crossing the hall at the time, so took it in from our obliging district postman, and conveyed it to the study, where Alan looked up in surprise.

“What’s that in aid of?” he demanded.

“Something in Yorkshire,” said I, inspecting the postmark, which was that of Adel, Leeds. “I deduce, my dear Watson,” I added, “that it is something to do with our Anglo-Saxon researches, since (a) nobody in Yorkshire is likely to write to *us* for any other reason, and (b) Adel is the ‘home’ of the famous Anglian gravestones.”

“All right, Sherlock,” laughed Alan, “when you’ve finished the forensic lecture, what about opening the thing?”

I did, and proceeded to read:—

Dear Sirs,

Having studied with interest your work on the Saxon Kingdoms, I write to introduce myself as a student of the period. I took a First in History at the University, and am now working, for my D.Litt. thesis, on Anglo-Saxon funeral customs—a subject

upon which you may possibly have seen a few contributions from my pen in "Archæologia." As I am proposing to drive down to the Midlands to study the famous bone-crypt of Rawton, and find that my way lies through your district, I wonder if I might call upon you on the way, to discuss one or two technical points in which your knowledge is far superior to mine. If so, I shall be most grateful if you will please intimate, by the enclosed stamped envelope, what day next week would be most convenient to you for me to call.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Latouche

The signature aroused our interest at once, for Mr. Martin Latouche, M.A., had already attracted our attention as a young scholar of promise, by virtue of the articles to which he modestly alluded.

"Well," said Alan, "he has a very long journey by car, and if you are agreeable, I suggest we offer him hospitality overnight, both on his way down and on the return trip."

I agreed warmly, feeling also that this visit of a fellow-worker would be of mutual advantage, besides being a pleasant break for us ; for, though we are in correspondence with scholars all over Europe, we rarely have a visitor to our Wolds stronghold. The invitation was therefore sent off the same day, giving Mr. Latouche a free hand as to his arrangements and pointing out that we should be at home all the next week.

In due course our new acquaintance, who had acknowledged the invitation with prompt courtesy and grace, arrived in an ancient but serviceable four-seater saloon, from which he extracted with

great care, in addition to his suitcase, a leather-covered box about a foot square ; this, he explained, contained a delicate whole-plate camera, and he insisted on carrying it to his room himself.

Mr. Latouche, who in appearance was the typical lanky, untidy and rather ascetic-looking young University lecturer, proved to be as well-informed as his articles indicated, and by no means a narrow specialist, but a man of wide culture. I need not inflict on the general reader our conversation over the excellent dinner produced by our man, for—as may be supposed—it was highly technical. I may say, however, that our guest had explored some queer byways of knowledge connected with his period and was able to cast light on some matters that had puzzled both Alan and myself, though we were getting on for twice his age. When at last we all did decide to retire, he announced his intention of making a reasonably early start in the morning, so that, as it is not so far across country from our place to Rawton, he could return to us the same night.

Accordingly, 8 a.m. saw him on his way, complete with his precious camera-case. He pressed us to join him in the expedition, but Alan was 'up to the eyes' in proof-correcting for a small popular book which a publisher had inveigled him into writing, and I was woefully in arrears with several book-reviews for a learned quarterly, and was near the time-limit through my dilatory habits. Poor Latouche! I wish now that I had laid aside my work and gone with him, for I might then have prevented the tragedy that robbed the world, by a means beyond mortal understanding, of a brilliant young scholar.

However—about an hour after our guest's departure, John, who in addition to his more "butlerian" duties acts as our gardener and odd-job man, interrupted my reviewing to inform me he had just noticed that the head of a rainwater stackpipe from the roof-gutter was dangerously loose, "and please will the guv'nor see what can be done abaht it, for we're going to 'ave 'eavy rine soon."

Looking at the damage from below, I found I could best inspect it by going upstairs and sticking my head out of the guest-room window. Entering, the first thing that met my eye was a fine and expensive whole-plate camera, standing on an occasional table.

"Oh, dear!" I thought, "Latouche *will* be annoyed when he gets to Rawton and finds he's left that behind."

I could only vaguely suppose that before retiring, he had been overhauling the camera, had forgotten to put it back, and had seized the case without noticing. "Yet surely," I thought, "he must have seen it, right under his nose, and it seems strange he didn't notice the difference in weight when he picked the case up—still, perhaps he's as absent-minded as I am."

So, after mentioning the fact to Alan, who agreed with me that it was useless to think of pursuing Latouche with the camera in our car, as he had over an hour's start and was, indeed, probably at Rawton by now, I dismissed the matter from my mind and, having given John instructions about the offending spout, returned to my interrupted reviewing.

We dine at seven, and, as we have not yet descended to the modern barbarity of a "cocktail hour,"

Alan and I were strolling in the garden when, about 6.30, our guest returned. He narrowly missed the gatepost in negotiating the drive entrance, and as he stepped out of the car, I thought from his face that he did not look very well.

“Did you have a tiring drive back?”, I asked sympathetically.

“Not so very,” replied Latouche, “but I think I’ve caught a touch of the sun—it’s been very hot, you know, and I’ve been out in the sun taking photographs.

“Photographs!” exclaimed Alan, “Why, you went off and forgot your camera.”

Mr. Latouche looked, I thought, slightly sheepish. “Oh,” he said after a slight pause, turning at the same time to get his camera-case off the back seat, “I had another camera with me, a small pocket Leica, and decided I didn’t want the big one.”

Then why on earth, I wondered, as we strolled towards the porch, did he want to lug the whole-plate case about? Something of my thoughts must have been visible on my face (for I am no actor), for Latouche said rather hastily: “I often eject the big camera on a job like this—the case is very useful for carrying my instruments and notebooks.”

He went off to his room with his precious case to wash before dinner, while I attended to the ritual of sherry, and our excellent Amontillado put some colour back into his face, though he still complained of feeling a little dizzy; and at dinner he made only the barest pretence of eating.

However, conversation was lively enough, and our guest got us deeply interested in a theory he had developed about Anglo-Saxon racial mixtures.

It now came out that one of his chief objects in visiting Rawton had been to test this theory by measurement of a large number of the skulls in the parish-church bone-crypt (which, my readers may be aware, is one of the best in England, the others being at Hythe in Kent, and Rothwell in Northants). Latouche's theme was that no anthropologist had yet tried to distinguish between the skulls of the Anglian, Saxon, Jutish, and Frisian peoples who comprised our "Anglo-Saxon" invaders, and he was confident that his own research was casting light on the matter.

"Good gracious!" said Alan, "if you set about measuring dozens of those skulls, I should think the verger wished you in blazes!"

"He did, rather," replied Latouche, "till I thought of giving him a good tip and telling him he could lock me in if he wished, as I should be some hours on the job."

"It is years since I visited Rawton," I put in. "So far as I remember, I always understood that the bone-collection was reputed to contain skulls of every conceivable sort—including even negro—but the only thing I *do* clearly remember about the place is an enormous thigh-bone that must have belonged to a seven-foot giant of a man."

"My own idea," I added, "speaking of course quite without any authority, is that these crypts, like Rawton, Rothwell, and Hythe, were filled up with the bones of medieval or later plague-victims.

"It's a pity we have no written records on the subject," remarked Alan, doing the honours with the port. "Kohler's standard work on the Black Death doesn't mention it, and parish clerks in the

17th-century epidemics, for instance, never tell us in their registers *where* they buried plague victims in a heavy mortality—I suppose they must have generally made a communal pit in the churchyard ; and later sextons, finding the ground over-full, would regard these rare crypts as a godsend when they wanted to re-bury the surplus bones.”

From this somewhat macabre discussion, in which our guest took little part, sitting with a very thoughtful look, we veered round to a highly-technical argument about the architecture and dates of these crypts and, as we had lingered long over the table and thoroughly punished the port, I suggested an adjournment to the library.

Latouche, however, on rising, went very queer. His face became a pasty yellow, and perspiration came out on his forehead. He looked as I have seen men look in the first stages of malarial attack, and I summoned James to get him a glass of hot whisky, lemon and aspirin—the best medicine for anyone suffering from fever.

Drinking the concoction gratefully, Latouche went off to bed, declaring that he would be “as right as rain” in the morning ; and Alan and I, always late birds, retired to the study and did our respective writing for another couple of hours. I remember noticing, when I decided to pack up for the night, that the grandfather clock registered just 12.30 a.m.

It had been a glorious late-summer day, and the night was equally lovely. A full harvest moon shone through the ancient window of armorial glass as I crossed the hall, and there was hardly a breath of air stirring anywhere. My way to my own room led past the guest-chamber along a rambling, panel-

led corridor, and as I passed Latouche's door I was surprised to hear what sounded like a window banging violently to and fro. Puzzled, I walked to the end of the corridor, inspecting each of the windows, and finally put my head out of the one at the end and looked to my left along the wall, since from here I could see the whole range of windows containing Latouche's room. His window was open, but firmly kept so by its iron pivot-bar. So, being able to make nothing of the noise, and feeling very sleepy, I turned in.

It must have been an hour later, that I was awakened by the most extraordinary collection of noises. My room was ice-cold, and there was a great roar and rushing as of a freezing wind right through it, though the heavy curtains were absolutely motionless ; and at the same time, there came from somewhere within the ancient house a series of unearthly groans, a furious hammering on a door, the deep sound of a throaty, unpleasant voice calling something I could not distinguish, and the clang, clang of a bell.

I leapt out of bed, flung on a dressing-gown, and rushed for the corridor and stairs, thinking—so imperfectly does the whole mind function in an emergency—that the house was on fire and that someone was trying to warn us.

Downstairs, however, all was calm and undisturbed, and as I flung open the porch door, the balmy night floated to me all the scents of the old English garden.

Telling myself I must have had a particularly unpleasant nightmare, I set off back to my room along the corridor ; but on passing Latouche's room,

I heard again the dreadful groaning and that grim, throaty voice. The door was unlocked, and I burst in, to be confronted by a terrible spectacle, the like of which I hope never to see again.

Our guest lay on his bed, a fearful sight, twisted and arched up as is the victim of cholera. His face and lips were black, and the flesh so sunken that he more resembled a skull than anything living. His pyjama coat was off ; he was ice-cold, and all over his torso were weird yellow and black patches of skin, while his armpits were swollen into hideous bulbous lumps. Groaning and muttering inaudibly, he twisted and retched in agony. After one look at him, I rushed to awaken Alan, but he too had been roused, and I met him hurrying along the corridor, with the frightened figure of the manservant in his rear.

Luckily, we had quite recently had the telephone installed in the house ; it was the result of a visiting Professor being seized with a heart attack, when our car was out of order and I had to ride three miles into Tilton on a cycle for a doctor. So in a very short time I was through to our own practitioner, Dr. Dolben, who is a neighbour and ranks as a personal friend. Rapidly I described the condition of our guest. The doctor whistled softly, and promised to be with us in ten minutes, for he had only just returned from an emergency call to a farm, and had not even had time to put his car away. Meantime, he ordered, we must get a collection of steaming hot blankets ready by plunging them in boiling water.

Dr. Dolben lost no time ; he arrived in the midst of these preparations, and accompanied us straight to Latouche's room. As we opened the door, we

were almost knocked back by a dreadful stench, as of decaying flesh, which was not there a few minutes before. The sick man was now sitting up, muttering and gasping, with an arm stretched out pointing to an object on his dressing-table, from which there radiated a weird bluish phosphorescence. It was his camera-case.

As the doctor bent over the patient, there came, from the direction of the camera-case, that horrible, hoarse voice I had heard before, and we could now hear distinctly what it said. It kept croaking, with fiendish relish: *Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead! More chalk for the doors, Master Will. The cart be full.*

At the same time, apparently from mid-air over the head of the bed, there came the deep clangng note of a handbell that I had also already heard.

Henry appeared in the doorway with a zinc bath full of steaming blankets as Dr. Dolben straightened himself up and looked very grave.

"This is incredible, Wayne," he said, addressing me as the nearest to him. "This young man is apparently suffering from cholera plus bubonic plague—every symptom present. I'm not sure we can save him. Quick now, with those blankets—wrap him up and keep him sweating."

We had just got Latouche into the blankets, and succeeded somewhat in easing the rigid tension of his body, when the doctor became aware of the extraordinary phenomena in the room.

Bring out your dead! croaked the voice.

"Where on earth is that coming from?" asked the doctor, "It's not the patient—he can't speak."

His eyes fell on the camera-case.

"Good God," he exclaimed, "What's the matter with that box?"

He too, had noticed the phosphorescent glow it was emitting.

"Look here," he added, "we can do no more for this poor fellow—what's his name, by the way?—for several hours, and if he *has* caught anything infectious, we run a risk staying here. What's more, I don't like the smell of your drains. Let's go downstairs, and tell me what you know about the start of your guest's illness."

So saying, he stepped across and shut the window, and the three of us trooped downstairs to the library. I did not realise until we got there that I had automatically picked up the camera-case. This I placed on the library table while Alan was putting out whisky and cigars.

Dr. Dolben sniffed as we seated ourselves. "If that young man upstair *has* caught cholera—which I doubt in the English countryside," he said testily, "I imagine your drains have something to do with it. That awful smell's even in here!"

"I rather think," replied Alan quietly, "that we have brought it in with us"—and he gestured towards the leather camera-case on the table.

"I suggest," he added, "that we open it, and see exactly what Latouche brought back in it, since we know he left the camera behind."

"Well," said I rather lamely, 'he did say he had his instruments and notebooks in it. Still, perhaps we ought to make sure." Here I mentioned the strange phenomenon of the phosphorescent glow, which Alan had not noticed upstairs, and which had now entirely gone.

Very gingerly, not knowing what might confront us, I lifted the lid of the case, to reveal to our astonished gaze a human skull. As the lid went up, though the skull was itself clean and bleached, that overpowering odour of corruption seemed to fill the whole room.

As I lifted the thing out and placed it on the table, the french windows of the library rattled as though a high storm-wind raged outside, and, right in my ear, the damnable voice I was beginning to dread croaked : *Bring out your dead!*

We all heard it, and exchanged glances ; and a few seconds later, there came again, as from a distance, the clang of the handbell.

“Well!” exclaimed Dr. Dolben. “This is the strangest case I’ve ever attended. It is utterly impossible, yet that man upstairs is *suffering from the Great Plague* of 1665. Incredible as it seems to anyone of scientific training, I can only conclude he got it from that”—jerking a finger at the grinning skull.

Dolben, as his name indicates, is a Cornishman, and the Cornish are a queer, ancient race, with deep-rooted beliefs in occult matters that would astonish the average Englishman. He has often told us, dropping in for a chat and a drink at night, of the queer, nameless things that haunt the Cornish coast churches where, they say, “the dead come up out of the sea ;” and my own experiences in the realm of the unknown have rather appealed to the Kelt in him than astonished the scientist.

“You fellows know,” he said, reaching out for his glass and a fresh cigar, “better than I (being historians), the circumstances and setting of the Plague.

It suddenly dawned on me just now, when I heard that voice and the bell while puzzling over the medical features of the case."

"Yes," I said gravely. "The corpses were too numerous to bury, and as Defoe's account tells us, men went round with the death-cart, calling out '*Bring out your dead*', ringing a handbell, and putting a cross in red chalk on the doors of the infected houses. They had to fling the bodies into pits".—

"Or crypts!", put in Alan quickly.

"Good God!", I exclaimed, as the truth dawned on me, "so *that's* why Latouche left his camera behind and took its case. He evidently wanted to abstract what he thought to be an Anglo-Saxon skull from the crypt—but the poor devil got hold of one from the Plague period instead."

The doctor looked a question ; remembering that he had not yet been furnished with the facts, I related briefly the circumstances of Latouche's visit and its ostensible purpose.

"Yes," he said calmly, when I had finished. "There is no doubt what happened ; the poor fellow has by some occult means become infected with the Plague—though for my reputation's sake I daren't let the narrow-minded General Medical Council know I think so. Observe that none of us three is any the worse, though we have been in dangerous infective contact : all of us with the patient, and you, Wayne, with the skull. Therefore there is nothing inherently infectious about the skull ; indeed, it must be scientifically impossible that the germs of the disease could have lurked in the thing for three centuries or so—to say nothing of the fact that the

Plague organism attacks the blood and tissues, not the bone-structure."

"It seems to me," he added, "that your unfortunate guest has either been singled out by some malignant power because the original Plague victim whose skull it is had been buried in an unconsecrated pit (I remember reading accounts of such pits being outside town ditches) and the bones only later tipped into the church crypt, and that his connection with the skull has released an Elemental dormant all this time ; or because he committed sacrilege in taking the thing."

Hardly had Dolben finished speaking, when a dreadful yell of agony rang through the house, and the skull, under our very noses, rose in the air a few inches off the table, and crashed with great violence on to the carpet, where it cracked across, while a thunderous hammering rained on the library door, and above it could be heard the dread call : *Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!*

Leaping to our feet, Alan and I were for making a concerted rush to the sick-chamber, but Dr. Dolben rose leisurely and put up a hand.

"Best take it calmly," he said. "That was the passing of a soul, by laws science will probably never understand."

Poor Latouche was, of course, beyond our aid by the time we reached his room.

The next day, there fell to me the sad office of telephoning his University to discover and notify his people, while Dr. Dolben specially visited the Coroner, an understanding man, not nearly so officious as most of his tribe—and left him a much-puzzled officer of the Crown.

Dolben did the post-mortem, and at the inquest, for which Latouche's father came down from Leeds, it was given out that on his return to us the young archæologist had ascribed his feeling ill to his having stopped and drunk water from a wayside pool in the heat. Dolben was consequently able to depose to a condition of acute gastro-enteritis, and a verdict of Death from Natural Causes was returned.

Natural causes, indeed! I wonder what the two bored-looking country reporters who attended the inquest would have written, could they have seen me that very night, after the undertakers had gone, unscrewing the lid of Martin Latouche's coffin to slip in the deadly skull ; or if I had let out in evidence that on the fatal morning we went to the guest-room after hearing his last scream of agony, we found a Plague cross in red chalk on its door-post, and another on that of the library—which crosses, rub as we would, could not be entirely eradicated until the day after scholar and skull had been given Christian burial in our country churchyard.